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CARR OF CARRLYON:

A Novel,

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

HAMILTON AÏDÉ,
AUTHOR OF "RITA" "CONFIDENCES," ETC.

"Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children."—Exodus xx. v. 5.

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BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

CARR OF CARRLYON.

PART I.—*continued.*

CASA LAMBERTI.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE unhappy old devotee sat with the *scaldino* upon her knees, and the Jesuit before her. The expression on her countenance was made up of terror, perplexity, and above all, the most abject abasement. In the oily tongue of her confessor was all the law and the prophets. She could no more struggle successfully against it, than the doomed bird under the fascination of a serpent.

"*Si é fatta Cristiana?*" she inquired; the

conversion to Romanism being only more laconically expressed, by the "making herself a Christian" to narrow-minded bigotry, even in the countess's station.

"*Davero*," replied the priest. "But this has not been accomplished without some difficulty, and the promise of procuring her a good *partito*. Your son she inclines to most of all; and as I think she will exercise an advantageous influence over him, you must exert yourself, contessa, to bring about this result."

"But he loves the other one, padre; and you know how obstinate he is, poor boy!"

"The other has thrown him over for the Englishman, and the count may be brought to marry this girl, through pique. She is clever and may work us much good; and I tell you that it is *essential* to separate your son at once from his dangerous companions, and attach him to some sharp-witted woman, who will obtain a righteous ascendancy over him."

"But—but," stammered the poor lady, ashamed of naming so sordid a consideration to the

spiritually-minded father, "is she not very poor? a dependant on this Courteney family?"

"She engages—how and whence I know not—to procure some fifty or sixty thousand scudi for her marriage portion."

"It is very strange, is it not?"

"We have nothing to say to the strangeness of it," remarked the priest, somewhat sharply. "She undertakes that it shall be forthcoming before the negotiations are concluded. And you know that it would be difficult to obtain as much with any *partito* here, in the present state of the count's fortunes—unless, indeed, you sought for an alliance among the *mezzo ceto*."

"No," replied the countess with a sigh. "His father was a proud man, and so is Guido. The Lambertis were counts in the Marches in the fourteenth century. They have never degraded themselves to a mere mercenary marriage. But what do you know of this girl's birth, padre? She may belong to the *mezzo ceto* herself?"

This momentary glimmer of reason was quickly put out by a severe look from Padre Stefano.

"Do you imagine I have not inquired, my daughter? Confine your excellent observation to matters you can understand. I have seen the register of this young lady's birth, and letters written by her illustrious papa, whose family is one of the oldest in England. You may rest satisfied on this head."

"Indeed, padre," said the poor lady, submissively, after a moment's pause, "I fear I shall not succeed in persuading my son to listen to reason; but of course I will obey you. Anything to serve the interests of our holy Church, and to promote the spiritual welfare of my Guido."

"You must work upon his feelings; and as I have already said, pique may do somewhat. But you have no time to lose. I learn this evening there is a change in the plans of the Courteney family again. They depart in a few days."

"The blessed Virgin be praised for that!" ejaculated Madame Lamberti, fervently. "I have had no rest since they have been here, and shall have none as long as they remain. They have paid their rent up for the next three months,

so I have no disquietude on that score, but oh! I feel as if my Guido were never safe as long as that other girl was here! She has exercised some unholy spell over him. He neither eats nor sleeps. I hear him walking up and down the room half the night, father."

"Marriage will cure all that," replied the priest, smiling.

"May he not return to be as he was before they came,—when they depart?" said the poor mother.

"I repeat, it is necessary that we obtain a hold over him *now or never*, and it rests chiefly with you to accomplish this."

The above is but a fragment of a long conversation which passed between the priest and his victim about a week after Carr's proposal, and two days after Sara's nocturnal wanderings. Her interviews with Padre Stefano, which had been pretty frequent before then, had even been longer and more frequent since. And while the old woman was as a puppet in the hands of the priest, he, astute man as he was, was but a puppet in the hands of the girl.

The marriage could not take place at Bologna. Florence was the nearest place where there was a clergyman; and a favourable change in the weather produced so corresponding a one in Mr. Courteney's health, that he declared himself equal to undertake the journey. He seemed to have rallied, indeed, ever since the marriage was decided on: and though the physician looked grave and shook his head, he could not positively interdict the journey by short stages. It was agreed that Carr, who was as impatient of delays as Mr. Courteney seemed, should go on to arrange certain necessary preliminaries, and that the Courteneys should follow three days later. Mrs. Courteney alone opposed all haste, and would have temporized if she could: spoke of the impossibility of her daughter's wedding garments being made in this haste; and suggested that there should be at least a month's interval before the marriage. But Carr's characteristic impetuosity was seconded in this instance by Mr. Courteney's evident anxiety that the matter should be concluded.

"In my state any unnecessary delay is dangerous. I am well enough to move just now. I may not be so a fortnight hence; and in a month's time I may be gone on a longer journey, who knows? The settlement is so simple a matter, that we may expect it from Paris in a few days. What then is there to detain us?"

Gilda made no objection. She was quiet, pale, and passive. Far from avoiding Carr now, she met him with her gentle smile, and listened to all his rapturous nonsense, and seemed to feel that in plighting her word she had relinquished all further right to act for herself, and must, perforce, lean upon and cling to the support she had chosen. His tact was never more gracefully and adroitly employed than in speaking to her of the happy future they would lead at Carrlyon. Almost the first time they had met, she had expressed an eager desire to become acquainted with English country life. She would see it now, he told her, under auspices which he hoped would make her love it, and prevent her casting a regret back to Italy . . . and he described the old

house, with its picture-gallery, and banqueting-hall, and sunny terraces, and herds of fallow deer swimming across the lake to be fed on summer mornings, and the rides down forest glades, and the village, with its schools and its ivied church, and the Christmas bounty—which should be called "Geraldine's bounty," when *she* was Lady of the Manor,—and the loving tenantry, and the children's feasts, and—and—in short, like portraits of Queen Bess, his brilliant picture of the golden time that was to succeed their marriage, had no shadows. Yet shadows there were, only he ignored them. His father's sturdy figure pointing to his diminished rent-roll; his mother's implacable face of spite, and wrath, and disappointment; he saw them both, but he resolved they should not interfere with the happiness of that prospect. Had not his life been passed in twisting them both round his fingers? When the thing was *done*—accomplished beyond recall—they would submit to make the best of it: though he well knew what obstacles would be thrown in his way to *prevent* it, if possible.

Therefore, he was anxious that the marriage should take place before any letters or messenger, in reply to his announcement, could reach Italy. In that announcement of his engagement, he said nothing of its immediate fulfilment; with reference to the sale of the farm, he contented himself, on second thoughts, by expressing the assurance that he should always be happy to consent to anything tending to make his father comfortable; and he felt certain that Lord Carrlyon, on *his* part, would never refuse his consent to a step upon which the happiness of his son depended. To his mother I am afraid he assumed a sharper and more decided tone, as better calculated in his estimation to produce the desired effect. He reminded her that he had never given her the smallest reason to believe he should marry to please any one but himself. He *had* pleased himself. He was prepared for all she could say, and he begged beforehand to assure her it would not have the least weight with him. His mind was fully made up, and his word pledged. The wife he had chosen was one whom Lady Carrlyon

ought to be proud to receive as a daughter-in-law. She was rich in every mental and personal grace, which he had lived long enough to consider superior to all other riches. In conclusion, he had the effrontery to hope that his mother would send his bride-elect some small trinket, from the great family jewel-case, as an earnest of her ladyship's affectionate regard.

He was more in love than ever: forgot himself, his little vanities and small social triumphs, the selfishness of the spoilt child, the arrogance of the admired and successful man; forgot everything but her: and the love which began as a pastime, now influenced every thought and action. Perhaps the combativeness of his nature, which I have already shown was so prominent a feature, added to the ardour of his passion for the time. He swore that the earnestness of his devotion should gradually melt her coldness. He would overcome and drive out that old memory; he never doubted it. And, in truth, this energy of purpose, the ennobling influence of one healthy feeling, strong and true, in a petty life of

dilettanteism, made itself felt; the outlines of the man seemed broader and bolder than they had hitherto. Gilda was not insensible to this; what woman could be so? She said she had done him injustice: she tried to repair it by every means in her power. The week that had elapsed was one of probation to her: it was an effort always to appear cheerful, to drive back the thought that *would* rise unbidden at times, and to enter—or seem to enter—into all Carr's plans with interest. When she failed, she reproached herself: for was he not more tender and more forbearing than she had believed possible?

One trial was spared her. Guido she never saw. Since that interview with Mrs. Courteney he had not been inside the apartment. She did not hear his name mentioned. By tacit consent, neither her mother nor herself had alluded to him since *that* day: Gilda, indeed, was ignorant that her mother had seen him. No good was to be gained by repeating to her the substance of that interview. The best, the only thing, that her mother could hope, was that the memory of this

early love, which the girl at least had no idea was returned, might die out and be forgotten in these two young lives. Mrs. Courteney's partiality for Carr made her, perhaps, more sanguine that the redemption of her child's happiness lay in his devotion.

Such was the state of feeling, and the position of affairs, in the family on the day when it had been finally resolved that Carr should proceed by diligence the following morning to Florence, engage an apartment for the Courteneys, and make the necessary arrangements for the marriage forthwith. He had already written to the Secretary of Legation, who was a friend of his, begging him to facilitate matters; and it was agreed between Mr. Courteney and himself that the ceremony should take place, if possible, four or five days after their arrival in Florence.

That evening, as they sat round the tea-table, Garofalo, who had not been to see his friends for some days, unexpectedly made his appearance at the door. The worthy professor looked rather pale and anxious, as though some matter of

more than common gravity weighed upon his mind.

Mr. Courteney, who was stretched in his *chaise longue* near the fire, with his pocket-volume of Horace between his finger and thumb, greeted his old friend with unusual warmth.

"How fares it with our learned professor? I have been here, on this sofa, for the last two days, expecting you to come and see me."

"Hè! signore," responded the Italian, grasping the invalid gentleman's thin hand, "I have had business of importance occupying me. *Chè vuole?* I am glad to see you better. You, too, caro signore, have been occupied, I believe? Is it too late to offer my felicitations?"

"Very nearly; for in less than a week we shall be gone."

"I regret it much, signore. This house will indeed seem deserted without you: but who can tell how long any of us will remain here? Guido himself is off to-morrow."

"Guido!" exclaimed Mrs. Courteney, aloud. The attention of every one of the party was fixed

upon the professor, otherwise the extraordinary convulsion of Sara's face could hardly have escaped notice. The cup of tea she was carrying to her lips shook so that she was obliged to set it down.

"By-the-by, that reminds me," said Mr. Courteney, "that we have not seen Count Lamberti, either, for some days. What is the cause of this sudden departure?"

The professor laid his forefinger on the side of his nose.

"*Private affairs*, which call him to the north of Italy for a short time, signore."

Carr involuntarily fixed his eyes upon Gilda while the above was passing. She turned a shade paler, and a low sigh—so low indeed that it scarcely reached him—escaped her after the professor's last speech. An awkward silence followed. Each member of that small party felt it, and knew the reason; that is to say, his own reason: and for some minutes there was nothing heard but the noise of the professor's copious pinch of snuff, the taking of which was always at-

tended by a sound like that of a terrier worrying a rat.

"You must come and visit us at Florence, Garofalo," said Mr. Courteney at last, "the *città superba* of your favourite poet must have some attraction for you."

"Ah! it is as ungrateful to me as it was to the divine Dante," replied the professor, shaking his head. "A Florentine, I am exiled from her walls, signore; and if we meet again, it must be elsewhere—for the present. But," he added in a livelier tone, though with equal earnestness, "congratulate me, signore! What think you? I have made the acquaintance of two *such* men since I had last the honour of seeing you! Italians—true gentlemen, true scholars, and both of them full of the most interesting details for me."

"Who are these uncommonly rare birds?" asked Mr. Courteney, sarcastically.

"One is called Jacoppo Rossi, a Venetian; the other, Giovanni Tibaldi. His country I cannot find out; such an entertaining companion! and full of instruction."

"Where did you make the acquaintance of these gentlemen, Garofalo? I never heard you speak before in such terms of any of your townsfolk."

"Ah! caro signore. These were forwarded to me from Venice, by a friend. They are not to be found here."

"Forwarded? not to be found? What do you mean? Where are they living?"

"Living! They have been dead, caro signore, between three and four hundred years. These are their MS. letters, despatches, and journals, full of illustrations to the history of the time, with many quotations from the divine poet; a volume of priceless value to me, copied by my friend from the archives of Venice . . .. I know these men, I know them as well as if I had seen them in the flesh! Ha! rare fellows! rare fellows, signore."

The good faith with which the enthusiast spoke, and was evidently so carried away by his admiration of these defunct worthies, to forget for the moment every other subject, called a smile into

the face of his auditors, and effectually diverted the channel of conversation from Lamberti.

Nevertheless, later in the evening, when an opportunity offered itself of addressing Mrs. Courteney in a low voice, and without attracting marked attention, Garofalo said,—

"Our friend charged me to deliver a message to you, signore, and one to your daughter,—through you . . . you will comprehend his motives for not bidding you farewell in person. He bade me deliver those farewells, with his heart-felt prayers for your welfare, and that of the signorina. He was not aware that your own departure was so near at hand."

"When is he going? and will he leave his mother for any length of time?"

"He has had a message from a good friend of ours—a friend of Italy's,"—the professor frowned mysteriously; "and he was glad to leave Bologna just at this moment. Important events may arise. I am not at liberty to say more. He may return soon, but it will depend on certain contingencies, and other wills than his own."

As he uttered the last words in that peculiarly hoarse whisper, which is often heard more distinctly than an ordinary conversational tone, Sara Gisborne passed close by. The ribbon of her sleeve caught in the back of the professor's chair; or at least it appeared to do so. The movement was adroitly managed, and it would have been difficult to tell from the expression of her face that she had heard a word that was said.

A few minutes later she sauntered out of the room. No one ever took any notice of her goings and comings, and she knew she was safe from observation.

In the ante-room she flung herself down into a chair, and sobbed. Unnatural as this may appear in one so hard, cruel, and relentless, consistency is, in reality, the only thing which is unnatural in human nature. The passionate heart of the girl was lashed into a perfect storm at the idea of seeing Guido no more, just now when her plans seemed ripe for execution. A few days —only a few days more; but how much might have been effected in those few days. Forget-

ful of prudence, forgetful of everything but the frustration of her heart's wild dream, for which she had toiled and plotted so long, Sara determined that he should not depart without her making one last and desperate effort. She would compromise herself—no matter—she would risk that fair fame which was almost her only worldly capital; but what mere worldly considerations, without any stronger support, could restrain her at such a moment?

Whatever was to be done must be done quickly.

She rose, and running to the door which I have already mentioned as connecting the Courteney's apartments with those occupied by Guido and his mother, she drew back the heavy bolts, and opened it. Upon closing it again, she found herself on the dark staircase. A draught of cold air came up from the open passage below. She stood still and shivered, brushed away the tears that still lay upon her cheek, and tremblingly approached the door she knew to be his, and beneath which a light was shining.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE young advocate was in his room alone, surrounded by the few preparations he was making for his sudden departure. A pile of letters and papers—most of them in cipher—entrusted to his care by some of the liberals of Bologna, for their friends in Milan; a small valise; an engineer's map; and a case of pistols were near him. He had announced his departure to his mother an hour previously, under the pretext of law business, which would detain him at Milan for a few days. The countess received the intelligence in a way that surprised her son. Two days had elapsed since her conversation with the Jesuit father, and she had not yet summoned courage to broach the subject of it to Guido. She now said very little; but in this reticence

she seemed to be exercising a great restraint over herself.

"You will come back and spend an hour with me later, *figlio mio*, will you not?"

It appeared as though she were almost anxious to get rid of him for the moment.

Guido had eagerly hastened to obey a summons which might be of importance to his country, and released him for a time at least from a life which had become almost insupportable. His incapacity for application to any of his old studies had increased. Over and over again he sat down, and attacked the subject before him: in a few minutes his thoughts had wandered far away. He was miserable. He felt that so long as he remained under that roof with the Courteneys it was hopeless. The secret missive, with its prospect of very different employment ere long, came like a wholesome tonic, arousing him from despondency, and bracing his relaxed energies. His country wanted him; the deep wound in his life which he knew his own nature too well to believe could ever be *healed*, must not be suffered

to eat away all the man's vital force. He had talked of *change*, but the very strength of purpose (whether the principle that guided it were right or wrong), which had made him resist the noblest, as it is the subtlest, temptation to which man is here exposed, denoted a character of iron mould, less susceptible than most things to the influence of time. This love would remain as a shrine whereon to offer up his purest thoughts; a sanctuary wherein to retire from the turmoil and strife of the world. But Guido was a man of action: a man whose sympathies led him to regard it as the first duty of every citizen of the state to be up and stirring in such times; and as the depth of moral degradation to be sunk in indolence and self-indulgence. It was not less a principle, therefore, than a necessity of his nature to work; and work requiring energy, skill, and forethought, was the best medicine now to "minister to a mind diseased."

His preparations were nearly completed. He stood there with folded arms, looking at a little glove that lay on the table before him; and

while he yielded to this momentary weakness, his thoughts wandered far, far away from the business of the present hour, and hard practical considerations for the future. . . . He was startled by a low knock at the door, and thrust the glove hurriedly into his breast. Upon his invitation to enter, the door slowly opened, and the figure of Sara Gisborne met his astonished gaze.

"You are going away early to-morrow, Guido Lamberti, and I have come—to wish you good-by."

She spoke in a low tremulous voice, very unlike her usual self; and rapidly, as though not trusting herself to weigh and consider what words she had come there to say.

"You shun any leave-taking with the Courteneys," she went on. "The strength of a man's will is such, that you have rooted up already the boyish passion for a child who was insensible to your love, and will soon be another's. Is it not so? Well, Guido Lamberti, the step I take is without precedent, unwomanly—call it by what name you will; but I am come to tell you there

is one who is willing to devote her whole life, nay, to lay it down in your service, Guido Lamberti! A woman, whom you do not love at present, indeed, but whose devotion your heart would recognize in time; a woman whom it is in your power to mould for good or ill; who would toil and plot for you; whose energies—they are greater than most women's—should be concentrated on the cause you have at heart. She asks for nothing but tolerance at first. She knows you must recover from the wound under which you still suffer, before she can hope for anything more; and—and she would not now, Guido Lamberti, run the risk of exciting your contempt by taking this extraordinary step, but that time presses, and that if they are not now united, fate may divide those two lives for ever!"

"Signorina," said Guido, gravely, taking her hand, "there is not so much love in the world that one can afford to be ungrateful for it! But I will not deceive you. I have no love, nor shall I ever have any, to give in return. How a grave, taciturn man can have won, unwittingly,

the affection of so brilliant a woman as yourself, I know not; but your imagination has endowed him, signorina, with qualities he does not possess, I fear. Time and absence will teach you that you were mistaken, and——"

"No, no, Guido!" cried the girl, passionately; "don't talk of time and absence! I cannot continue to live as I am doing. I cannot remain with these people. I have always hated them. I hate them worse than ever *now*. If I am forced back to that life, I shall become desperate—reckless: my bosom seething over with bitterness and disappointment. God knows what I may not do! I hold even now a secret in my possession which might break off this marriage. But I will not do *that*," she added, while her eyes flashed again. "No! I have a revenge for past wrongs more sure than that."

Guido looked at her in stern surprise.

"Are they not your benefactors of whom you thus speak?"

"No!" she exclaimed fiercely, and her voice had now risen from the murmur in which she

began to a pitch far above its ordinary one. "My cry is like that of Esau of old! They have robbed me of my birthright, and now they have robbed me of my blessing—the blessing of your love, Lamberti! I have good cause to hate them!"

"You speak in riddles, signorina, and it is not for me to unravel them. Forgive me if I remind you that a false construction might be placed on your presence here. We live surrounded by spies in this house. Permit me to conduct you back to your own wing of the palace."

"What do I care?" she cried, with a passionate burst of tears; "what do I care for the construction that is put on my presence here? it is the *truth.* I would have sacrificed all, *all* for you! Whatever I become in after life, whatever depth of degradation and self-abasement I may reach, it is owing to *you,* who might have redeemed me, and who abandon me now to all the worst passions in my nature."

While she was yet speaking, the noise of a key in the lock, and of a door turned sharply on its

hinge, made Guido start and look towards the panel which communicated with his mother's room. It flew back, and the countess, pale and feeble, followed by the Jesuit father, stepped into the room.

"The sound of your voices, my son," began the old lady, in quivering accents, "attracted the good padre and me, and we are come here to confirm the hopes we have lately entertained, that you have transferred your affections from the heretic English lady to her whose eyes have been graciously opened by our blessed Virgin to the truth of our holy faith."

It was a lesson she had learned by heart; and she went on, after a frightened, hurried glance at her son's stern face—

"We know your upright heart, so sensitive to the call of honour, my son; and that you would not compromise the fair fame of this lady by remaining closeted with her at this hour, were you not prepared to vindicate her character, as your wife, before the world."

"It is a choice which will cause your friends

no disquietude in this world, nor imperil your salvation in the next," chimed in Padre Stefano.

The young man's brow was knit; but a scornful smile played round his mouth. He saw the Jesuit's plot; and turned his piercing eyes upon the girl, to read there how far she was implicated in it before he trusted himself to speak.

She was white, and her fingers twitched nervously, but she returned him gaze for gaze.

"I am innocent of any share in this, Guido Lamberti, so help me God! Reverend father, I appeal to you whether——"

"The appeal is needless, signorina," said Guido, with grave courtesy. "I am quite ready to acquit you of any share in so puerile a plot. My poor mother, had you not submitted to be a tool in this, it would be hardly worth my notice. Out of respect for you, I do not reply to this 'reverend father' as he deserves, by kicking him down-stairs, as I should any other scoundrel whom I caught eavesdropping. But, remember this, if any scandal should arise from this lady's being known to have been here, the scandal is of *your*

making, sir; and your cloth, for which I have uncommonly little respect, as you know, will not protect you. What has passed between this young lady and me is a matter which concerns us *alone;* and I submit to no man's interference in such things. Signorina, will you permit me to conduct you back to your own apartments?"

Though in the form of a request, there was really more of command in the words, as he said them, and took the girl's trembling hand in his. What use was there in resistance, even if she could have resisted that strong will? But shame and mortification held her dumb. Without even raising her eyes towards her two advocates, she suffered him to lead her from the room, and across the passage, to the unbarred door through which she had found her way there. As they now reached it, she seemed to make an effort to speak, but her voice, or the words in which she would have clothed her meaning, failed her. She shrank away from the firm, manly pressure of the hand he once more extended, in bidding her farewell, and with her white face cowering under

a tangle of unraveled hair, she fled down the dimly-lit passage, without even looking at him again.

He found his room vacated on his return, and after a few moments' consideration descended to his friend, the professor. He was at his desk as usual, but this time he was writing letters.

"Strange things have been taking place in this house to-night, *amico mio*, but even to you I must not disclose them. I think it better to antedate my departure, however, by a few hours, as that rascally priest may be plotting to try and detain me. Heaven knows what ecclesiastical laws they may not bring to bear on a poor fellow who—well! no matter—but I think I am as well absent from Bologna for a short time. The fact is," he added, with a sorry attempt at a laugh, "they are bent on marrying me to some woman who either is, or affects to be, a pious Catholic, and whom the Jesuits think they can have under their thumb. I ought to be honoured at their bestowing so much notice on me."

"Hè! *caro mio*, your great abilities and your strong character, without the weight of your name, make you a formidable adversary, and would make you as valuable a friend. . . . But, let me ask, how are you to get away at this hour? There is no diligenza till six o'clock."

"A *carretta* will take me to Modena, where I shall arrive before the early diligenza starts. I will send the porter's boy for one."

While he crossed the court, the professor rose and drew from a leathern bag stuffed into a chink in the wall, five and twenty gold pieces. Ten of these after some hesitation he replaced. He would gladly have given the entire sum, but he dared not part with the whole of those small savings, laid up against a day when he might no longer be able to earn a bajocco. On the count's return, the old man placed the money in his hand.

"Take it without hesitation and without shame," he said, "your funds will be nearly exhausted by this journey; and this is given not to you,

but to the cause we both have at heart. I have enough left for any pressing emergency, take it then, *figlio mio*, in God's name, and may He prosper your journey! If the moment be indeed arrived for Italy, if you remain away altogether, who knows but I may pack up my Dante and follow you?"

Guido pressed his old friend's hand in silence. He would not wound him by declining the offer; his pride was of another sort; and he valued that friendship beyond much gold.

"So be it, old friend. We understand each other. The young man's arm may one day support the failing one. You will hear from me from time to time, and learn how affairs in Lombardy are progressing. If the prospects of our friends there seem visionary, and their hopes in Charles Albert not likely to be realized; if, in short, this movement we are led to expect be one I cannot think myself justified in joining, you will probably see me back here before long. Watch over my poor mother while I am away. Those sharks will leave her no peace. God help her!"

He wrung his friend's hand, and then the two embraced, as Italians are wont to do. Five minutes afterwards he entered his mother's room. He had prepared himself for a violent scene. But as he opened the door his mother's prostrate figure on the bed, and the priest beside her, sent a shock through the son's heart. He rapidly approached her.

"Mother," he began, as he took her passive hand. There was no response, but a low moan, and the closed eyes feebly opened, and rested on the young man.

"Your mother, count, is sick unto death, I fear me,—and alas! my son, you are the cause of this!"

Thus murmured the smooth-tongued Jesuit. But Guido, who had seen the countess more than once before in this condition, recovered his presence of mind, and drawing from his pocket a travelling-flask, he applied it to her lips.

"It is only exhaustion, produced by long fasting, and mortification of the flesh," he said,

turning to the priest. "This and the recent agitation you caused her, have brought on this attack. There is a long score between us, padre, beware!"

"You speak a language, my son, I do not understand," returned the priest, with mock humility. "How can a poor man like me have offended you? As a true servant of our holy Church, and in the eternal interests of this excellent lady, I have enjoined certain religious exercises, which——"

"Spare your breath, and keep your defence for those who believe it," interrupted the count's stern voice. "You have starved her, and others like her, that your Order might be enriched,—you would bleed her of her last *bajocco*, in the name of religion, forsooth! Your lies, your frauds, your slander, are they not known to me? And you expect me to become a pious son of the Church, to believe in blinking pictures, and bleeding images! Go to! Mother, are you better? Can you listen to me?"

A faint colour on her lips and cheek showed

that the restorative had not been without effect. She faintly signified assent.

"I am called away—as I told you some hours ago, mother: it may be for months—it may be only for a few days. You must bear up, while I am absent; you must not be despondent about me, or suffer others to fill your mind with foolish or evil fancies about me. I go but to do my duty, as I believe my father would have done; and I will try not to prove myself unworthy of his name. Give me your blessing before I depart, will you not?"

The poor woman writhed upon her bed, and cast a piteous glance towards the priest.

"How can you expect to win a blessing," murmured the latter, "when you desert your mother in what may be her last hour, and disobey her voice, my son?"

It was but a very thin artifice to detain him. Even now Madame Lamberti raised herself with an effort, and cast her arms round her son's neck. The mother's love was too strong for the priest.

"You will go: I know it," she sobbed, "and

may the Holy Virgin watch over and lead you back to me! I will not cease to pray for you, my Guido; and, oh! if we do not meet again this side the grave, let us not be separated for ever hereafter!"

"We shall not," replied the young man, solemnly.

She lay locked in his arms; and memories of past years, before a cloud had risen up between them, crowded on those two hearts, pressed together for the last time. And then, not daring to trust himself to speak again, he rushed from the apartment.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CARR had only been in Florence a few hours, when a frantic, incoherent telegram from his mother reached him, imploring him to return to England instantly. This was followed in the due course of post by three letters; one from his father—a weak combination of command and entreaty to his son to break off his marriage, evidently dictated by Lady Carrlyon; one from that lady herself, as foolish and vulgar a composition as was ever committed to paper by an angry mother; and one from the family lawyer, informing the heir of all the Carrlyons of the confused state of his father's affairs, of the necessity of selling or mortgaging a much larger portion of the estate than had been originally contemplated, and lastly of Lord Carrlyon's incapacity to in-

crease his son's allowance in the event of his marriage.

Carr's impatience to place the question of his marriage beyond the pale of further discussion was only stimulated by this means. Ten days of solitary reflection, without opposition, or the necessity for active employment, might perhaps have led to the postponement of his marriage for a time. But ten days busily occupied in surmounting the minor obstacles of detail that often present themselves on such occasions, and in hurrying on the preparations for the ceremony, with now a frésh incentive to exertion in these irritating despatches from England—why, no fortuitous concurrence of circumstances could be so favourable to the speedy accomplishment of this marriage with a man like Carr!

As his taking his bride to England was of course out of the question at first, when his reception at Carrlyon was sure to be humiliating and painful in the extreme, Carr made up his mind to remain in Italy for the next six months at least. The political horizon was growing more and more

overcast every day, but Carr had not lived in intimacy with the Courteneys without imbibing their liberal opinions on the subject of Italy. He regarded the approaching storm with interest, and had no hesitation in deciding to remain in a country which would probably be the scene of a revolution before many months were over. It wanted but a few days to Christmas. Immediately after the marriage he and Gilda were to proceed to Rome, and remain there during the Carnival, returning to Florence in Lent. The summer he proposed spending on the Lake of Como; and before that season was past, the dignified attitude he was to assume would, of course, bring his father and mother to reason. Then, with a lofty amiability, he would yield to their pressing solicitations, and take his fair wife home to be introduced to them. Whether he should consent to remain or no, depended entirely on the good behaviour of his parents. As he considered the matter over, he derived more and more comfort from the reflection that his wife's moderate income would be sufficient to render him independent of

any additional assistance from his father. He felt that this was what lawyers call the "strong point" in his case. And thereupon he wrote a temperate, but firm and manly, reply to his father, in which he regretted that there was any point upon which they should have a difference of opinion, but announced his confidence that Lord Carrlyon's calmer judgment would recognize the impossibility of his son's breaking his engagement, even if he felt so disposed. He moreover laid down the principle—somewhat sententiously, considering the circumstances—of free will unshackled by opinion or prejudice in such cases; and then, with considerable self-satisfaction, he laid down the pen.

A few days later the Courteneys arrived. It was a sharp, glittering day, with the keen Tramontana sweeping down all the streets that were open to the north, and a brilliant sun pouring almost intolerably upon such as lay towards the south, and were sheltered from the mountain wind. In the one, a few pedestrians, like a charge of bulls, drove blindly and furiously along, with heads

bent before the wind, and heavy cloaks swathed around their faces. In the other, cloaks were swung back, heads raised, and the pedestrians might not infrequently be seen to sink lazily back against a wall, and bask, like lizards, in the sunshine. The flower-girls, so notably characteristic of Florence, flaunted here, like butterflies, under the shadow of their large Leghorn hats, flinging their bouquets of choicest exotics into some of the carriages (the carriages, mark, in which there are *only* ladies, go by unnoticed), and bestowing a smile or a sprig of jasmine, out of very exuberance of heart apparently, on every passer-by. Were I disposed to moralize, here would be a fine opportunity for inquiring how many broken hearts have gathered, and tied up, and then given away with a gay and graceful smile, these tube-roses and camelias. There was a sad tragedy when I was in Florence connected with one of these *fioriaje*—but enough of that.

At an hotel upon the Lung' Arno, Laurence Carr took up his quarters; and you may be sure that the handsome, aristocratic-looking young

Englishman met with an unusual amount of attention at the hands of the flower-girls. He had secured a large apartment for a few weeks in the adjoining house, as being the warmest situation in the town, for Mr. Courteney, who was to go on to Pisa for the remainder of the winter, as soon as his daughter was married.

As the heavy *vetturino* carriage drove up to the door, and Carr, who was waiting there to receive them, handed out the three ladies, a group of flower-girls pressed round, thrusting their choicest bouquets on him, "per la bella signorina." It takes even less to gather a knot of idlers together in Italy than elsewhere. The arrival or departure of a travelling carriage never fails to accomplish this. In the crowd congregated about the door as Carr turned casually round, he recognized a face under a broad-leafed hat, which he had last seen in Bologna. His mind, however, was engrossed with too interesting a subject to give this one more attention, and he was certainly far from associating with that muffled stranger the gay Giulio Razzi.

Mr. Courteney retired at once to his room, and as Sara Gisborne sent word that she had a headache, and wished to be left undisturbed, Carr spent the evening alone with the mother and daughter. There was a restlessness, an agitation, about Mrs. Courteney's manner, which did not escape Laurence. Habitually melancholy as was the expression of her face, there was now an increased depression, alternating with a look of alarm, which prompted the young man to inquire, with his usual straightforwardness, if anything was the matter?

"My mother's strength has been over-taxed of late," said Gilda, sadly. "She is far from strong: and all this watching with my father, the excitement of a hurried journey, and of my approaching marriage, have been too much for her. You witnessed, I think," she added, lowering her voice, "one of her nervous attacks? they have been more frequent of late. I look forward, Laurence, so much to having her with us in the summer at Como. Papa says he is going to remain at Leghorn, but you'll make *her* come, at all events, won't you?"

There was something of her old playfulness in the tone. She was striving with all her strength to *forget* everything else but him; and had, indeed, at times, regained to outward appearance her sweet cheerfulness of manner. This last suggestion, which in the innocence of her heart she thought must give Carr pleasure, was certainly not calculated to do so as much as she imagined. If it was to have been made at all, it should have come from himself. However, he really liked Mrs. Courteney; and though with no uncommon selfishness in man he would have wished that Gilda's attention should be devoted solely to himself for a long time to come, he consoled himself with the reflection that it was a very different thing from having the *father* (with whom he never could feel at his ease) as a visitor for an indefinite period, and he managed to reply, without wincing—

"Certainly, darling, she shall be with us all the summer: only mamma must not engross *all* my Gilda's thoughts, eh? Is there anything, by-the-by, you think your mother would like from

England? I am expecting some things to be sent over. What shall I give her, Gilda, as a poor return for the treasure I am robbing her of?"

"Give her, Laurence, what will be worth more to her than anything—a son's affection. Poor mamma! when you know how good, and patient, and unselfish she is, you will love her almost as much as I do. Tell me," she added, looking up into his face with an expression of earnest inquiry, "have you heard from your own mother and father—since—since we were engaged?"

"I have, dearest. What then?"

"Only that—that I have not heard you speak of them. Will your mother be kind to me, Laurence?"

"I hope so, Gilda; and if not, you may depend on it you shall see very little of her."

That night, when he was gone, and all the house was still, Gilda sat at her open window, looking out into the quiet starlight. Sara and she no longer occupied the same room. Indeed, ever since that evening, now some weeks past, when Sara had so cruelly probed Gilda's heart,

a wall of separation, so to speak, had been growing up between the two girls. It may be that an instinct of the heart pointed to the true motives which lay at the bottom of the savage attack that had left Gilda bleeding and shame-stricken; it may have been only the natural repulsion of a pure, guileless nature to a corrupt one, when the depths of passion being stirred, the two souls came closer to one another than, in their daily intercourse, they had yet done. But Sara was outwardly changed lately. She had always been capricious; she was resolutely sullen and abstracted now, whenever she joined the family circle. During the last week of their stay in Bologna, the Courteneys had in reality seen little or nothing of her. Her change of faith—now openly avowed—was made the plea for long daily absences from home. No one opposed this, and no one thought of questioning her as to where she really went. Mrs. Courteney had never felt that she had any authority over the unruly Creole girl; it was too late to begin now endeavouring to assert it. Moreover, the

poor lady's mind was otherwise and painfully engrossed. She had anxiety enough of various kinds, or this might have rendered her more uneasy than it did. As it was, she was glad that her child would soon be separated from Sara. She did not underrate that young lady's abilities, and she felt that it was not improbable the young convert, by-and-by, might have endeavoured to influence Gilda. Though not bigoted in her religious opinions, Mrs. Courteney had clung steadily to the faith of her youth, through many years of wandering in Roman Catholic countries; and she would have regarded it as a heavy calamity had Gilda changed her religion. The mingled feeling of pity, mistrust and admiration, therefore, with which she had always looked on Sara, now gave place to an ill-defined dread. Having invariably treated her with a mother's kindness, it was still impossible she should feel for her anything of a mother's love. Sara, even in her most attractive days, had repelled sympathy. And now that she was harder and more impenetrable than she had ever before shown herself,

even in her darkest moments, Mrs. Courteney's kind heart could only heave a sigh when she thought what early wrong and wretchedness must have poisoned the fountain-springs of that young heart, and turned all its waters to bitterness! Confidence there was none, she knew, between them, and any attempt to bias opinions so resolutely taken, she was well aware would be fruitless. But she made up her mind that, by-and-by, when left alone with Sara, she would set herself patiently to work a change in that obdurate spirit: and in the meantime she was quite as well pleased that the girl's strange fit just now kept her aloof from Gilda, and left mother and daughter generally without the restraint of a third presence.

Gilda Courteney was alone, then, in her room that night. She looked out of the open window, and down upon the rushing Arno, where the lamps of the bridge flashed and quivered, and the black arches beneath were repeated in blocks of liquid shadow. Upon the opposite bank were the dim shapes of church and palace, huge piles

of tower and other building darkly defined against the starry night. That bank was unknown ground to her. Her feet had not yet wandered among its intricate streets and *piazze*. And as her eye rested with a vague curiosity upon these outlines of the unexplored city, she felt as though she were looking at her own future. The bridge she was soon to traverse, and which never could be recrossed, lay before her. The hard, solid bank on which she now stood would soon be left behind. Already the pleasant landscapes of the past had faded far away. Those blue mountain ranges—a sunny spot upon a lichen-covered wall—a trail of vine against a sunset sky; the pictures, often trivial enough, that are photographed in the memory from some accidental association, they belonged to a time that already seemed far distant. She had reached the bridge. What lay beyond it?

With no such misgiving should a young girl regard her future, when that future is of her own choice and making. Gilda would not have allowed that she felt any misgiving. Yet she

questioned what this future had in store for her with an anxious scrutiny. It was no want of confidence in Carr, but in herself. She had accepted him, because it seemed to be universally felt that she ought to do so, and because she had no good reason to give, since he had rejected the only one she offered. That childish passion she firmly believed to be extinct; and, on the other hand, the more she saw of Carr, the more she found to like. If it was possible for her to live as hundreds of other happy women did, entertaining a placid affection for their husbands; why then she *would* be happy. It was her own heart she feared; it was the doubt whether she would be content to exist on a lower range of feeling, having had a glimpse of something higher, and deeper, and stronger.

Oh, inevitable future! future that we build up for ourselves blindly in the dark, whose faint sky-outline the keen-sighted only may discern, predicting how the ragged walls will shape themselves as we grow near. We are as children that cannot bear the light! We grope on ever to

the end; and mercifully ordained is it of the All Wise that our poor human knowledge reaches no farther than the present upon which we stand. To foresee, without the power to avert; who could carry the intolerable burden of such knowledge to the end of a long life?

The girl gazed wistfully at those phantom-outlines opposite, and her thoughts took the direction I have indicated; while she drew her shawl closer round her, and crouched down by the window. To the occasional passers-by in the street below—and they were few at this hour, their footsteps echoing along the pavement in the clear night air, till they died away in the distance,—to such she was invisible. She had put out her candle; the window was a black square. And there she remained, how long she scarcely knew, until her attention was awakened to the sound of footsteps stopping beneath the window.

It was not, however, until the sound of a voice distinctly reached her ear that Gilda started, and leaning forward, endeavoured to discern the

speaker. Impossible to see more than two dark figures, apparently a man and a woman, in the door-way below. But that voice? surely she could not be mistaken, low as was the tone in which it spoke.

"Will you be in readiness when I call upon you? and willing to do my bidding, whatever it is? Remember I have warned you, I am something of a tyrant."

"It is a tyranny which is sweet to me, *bell' angiol mio!* But will you in return hold out no prospect of a speedy release from my suspense?

"None; I require to see, to know, more of you than I can in these stealthy interviews. Our acquaintance is of too short standing, Signor Conte, for me to bind myself to anything. But I will not deprive you of all hope: if you can stand the strange whims and caprices of a woman?"

"What is there I would not stand from you, *divina?*"

"If this war breaks out, are you ready to join the army? To gird on your sword, and help

to drive out the Austrian? I am aware that you have not been bred to such rude sport, and the scion of a noble house may——"

"*Corpo di Bacco!* you are laughing at me, my angel! Our education may have been neglected; but there are few of us, I hope, who will not be ready to gird on their swords when the good time comes. But if I am to wait till *then* ——!"

"You are poor. How do you intend to support a wife? I am extravagant."

"The padre told me what your marriage-portion would be," replied the gentleman, with the utmost *naïveté*. "On that, with what I have, we can live like gods!"

"Some of the gods lived uncomfortably enough," laughed the lady; a low mocking laugh. The next moment she exclaimed, "Hush! some one comes down the street. Don't stand there. *Buona notte.*"

She pulled the porter's bell, and disappeared through the door. The man walked leisurely away. Gilda listened with a beating heart for several minutes. Was she mistaken? Did that

woman belong to some upper floor apartment? The most acute ear could not have caught the sound of a footstep on the stairs. But at length her strained hearing detected the faint creaking of a door cautiously opened in the adjoining room.

And then she doubted no more.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE exertion of travelling produced such an unfavourable change in Mr. Courteney, that it was feared the marriage would have to be postponed. It had been fixed to take place a week after the date of their arrival in Florence. The morning following their arrival he was so exhausted that Mrs. Courteney became seriously alarmed. The physician when he saw him, told her plainly that any strong excitement in his present condition might be fatal. Quiet, perfect quiet, and a milder climate than Florence, were all he could suggest to hold the feeble links of life together.

But on the subject of the marriage, Mr. Courteney was as impatient as Carr could possibly be. He smiled almost contemptuously at the idea of being excited by it, and declared that

whether he were able to appear at the ceremony or not, it was to take place on the appointed day.

Gilda had something at her heart which she felt must be told her mother; but that poor worn face seemed pleading so earnestly to have no additional burden cast upon her, every time that Gilda sought to approach the painful subject, that day after day elapsed without her doing so. The swift hours, nevertheless, moved on with steady pace towards the moment that was to separate her from that tender mother, whose loving embrace she never remembered to have missed a single day since she was born. And as the time drew near, Mrs. Courteney's trouble and agitation of mind became more and more painfully apparent. The effort to appear calm before her husband rendered the strange excitement under which she laboured only more uncontrollable at other moments. Carr remarked upon it to Gilda more than once after that first evening of their arrival, and the poor child heaved a heavy sigh each time.

In spite of the want of sympathy between them,

Gilda had found comfort in the recollection that Sara would be left with Mrs. Courteney. That poor mother would at least have the girl whom her kindness had tended like a daughter, as a companion in the dreary days that, Gilda knew well, would follow her own departure. And now, to a young and generous heart, almost the worst feature in Sara's extraordinary conduct was its hard, calculating selfishness. It was evident she cared nothing for the man, whoever he might be; and whether or not she married him, would only make use of him for her own ends. It was the night before her marriage that Gilda nerved herself to repeat to her mother what she had overheard. But Mrs. Courteney's mind was so absorbed in one subject, that none other comparatively could produce much effect upon her. She and her child wept unrestrainedly in each other's arms that night, as though they felt it might be the last time they would ever be able to do so!

* * * * *

The marriage was over. They were gone.

There were only six persons present in the chapel. Carr and his two friends, Gilda with her mother, and Sara. Mr. Courteney was too weak to leave the house. He was wheeled into the room to receive the small party on their return, and to place a magnificent Indian shawl upon the bride's shoulders when she ran up and threw her arms round his neck. That was a sad breakfast that followed! and everyone felt it a relief when the travelling britska which Carr had hired for the journey drove up to the door. And now the last sobbing farewell was given, and they were actually gone. Gone! And in the window, watching them as they drove off, with a very peculiar smile upon her face, stood the figure of a young woman, balancing a letter in her hand. Should she send it, or wait?

Mrs. Courteney's room communicated, as it had done at Bologna, with her husband's. It was necessary to pass through it to reach the latter.

"I desire to speak with Mr. Courteney," said Sara, standing at the door of the first room. The

one beyond it was ajar, so that her words, slowly and distinctly uttered, could easily reach the person for whom they were intended.

Mrs. Courteney was in her own room, sitting with her hands clasped before the picture of that Mother of many sorrows, whose sweet, pitying face seemed to say in all moments of profound depression, "Be of good courage. I too have suffered."

She started to her feet at the sound of Sara's voice, and came hurriedly towards her.

"What is it you want?" she demanded in troubled accents.

"To speak with Mr. Courteney," repeated the girl, more distinctly than before, as she folded her arms and looked the other defiantly in the face.

"He is ill—exhausted; you cannot see him now. What is it, Sara?"

Gilda's words, which subsequent agitation had driven from Mrs. Courteney's mind, now flashed across it. She returned Sara's look with one of sorrowful, questioning wonder.

"My business is with Mr. Courteney," said the girl in the same hard clear voice as before. "If he knows that *I desire to speak with him* on a matter of importance——"

The hand-bell rang sharply from the adjoining room. Sara followed Mrs. Courteney without further invitation to the door.

"Why do you prevent her coming in?" said the voice of the sick man, irritably. "Admit her at once."

Mrs. Courteney stood back to let Sara pass, and the eyes of the two women met once more, as the wife glided out and closed the door behind her. Why did she shudder under that look, as though stung by a serpent? And why did some irresistible presentiment fasten her to the spot of floor where she stood close to the door, until, trembling, she crouched down there with her head in her hands?

Mr. Courteney was in his chair, propped by pillows. A desk, with several legal-looking documents, was before him. His face was of an ashy whiteness, but the clear pale flame of his eye

burnt as intensely as ever, through the gray shadows that had gathered round it.

He looked up at the young woman as she stood there, a few paces from his chair, in her white dress, which she had not yet laid aside after the wedding. He looked up at her, in silence; but with a strange indefinable expression which few, perhaps, had ever seen upon his face. She returned his look without flinching, her arms still resolutely folded.

"Mr. Courteney, I am going to be married. As a dependant on *your bounty*, I came to announce the fact to you."

There was a bitterness and insolence in the tone that did not escape his observation. He bowed his head slightly, and she continued, "Have you no curiosity on the subject?"

"None. You are your own mistress, to do as you please, Miss Gisborne.

"But I am penniless, and I want money. That is why I come to you. Shall I further tell you by what right I ask it?"

He remained silent. The hand in which he

held a paper trembled. He laid it on the table. "Proceed," he said, after a pause.

"It is a right you will not deny, when I invoke the name of Sara Morny."

He raised his wasted hand, and wiped the damp from his brow. This, and a nervous contortion of the mouth, were the only evidences of any extraordinary emotion.

"It is a right I *do* deny;" his voice was low but steady. "That name should have no influence on me."

"It is the name of one you foully wronged," said the girl, with flashing eyes. "The curse that fell upon you and yours from her dying lips yet rings in my ears. I swore never to rest till I had found you—and I have done so. The curse has already taken effect! Yes! Henry Dunstanly, under your assumed name, through all the changes of time and circumstance, chance has helped me to discover the secret hid from the whole world—ay! *from your own wife!* I now know what prompted you to take me into your house as something better than a servant, when you found me starving in

Genoa, a year ago! It was no generous pity; it was the stinging voice of remorse! You knew *me* —you recognized your child, abandoned twenty-four years ago, by the likeness to her mother. You thought I should never discover *you*. It was a cheap way of being quit with conscience! But did it never occur to you that the blood of Sara Morny flowed in the veins of this girl? That vengeance was her inheritance? That sooner or later it would track you out? It was a dangerous experiment making the offcast child an inmate of your house. Walls have ears, and my careful education has not led me to be above eaves-dropping, father!"

She laughed scornfully——

"What is it you mean? and what is it you want?" gasped Mr. Courteney.

"I mean," she replied slowly, "that the *other secret of your life* is equally known to me, and I am here to make use of both. You are in my power, Mr. Dunstanly."

He had leant forward in his eagerness, and now fell back, while a ghastly shade passed over his face.

He tried to speak, but could not. The girl lifted the strong stimulant which was on the table to his lips. It was horrible to see the act of apparent mercy performed with that ruthless expression on her face!

"Why do you come to me at the eleventh hour when the sand of my life is just run out?" he gasped faintly. "Why have you waited to say all this until now?"

A devilish smile crossed her lips.

"I have bided my time. I waited till Gilda was married, the thing accomplished beyond recall! Your intellect is still acute enough to seize all the importance of that fact for me? By a word this marriage might have been broken off; and neither of the parties much the worse. How different is the case now! the honour of a noble house is concerned: you apprehend my meaning?"

The dying man set his teeth hard.

"What object do you propose to attain by this course?" he murmured in a hoarse voice. "Your fancied vengeance will not reach *me* by any disclosure now. I shall be beyond it. If it is only

money you want, spare your threats, girl. There is a suitable provision made for you in these instructions which I leave my wife. This provision will place you beyond want." He took a paper from the table. "I leave no will: for the name I die bearing, and which my wife will bear after me, has no legal value, as you have discovered; I have therefore sold all my property out of the funds, and divided it into two equal shares. Out of my wife's portion, while she lives, will be paid you an annuity of two hundred pounds, and five thousand pounds at her death."

"Your *other* child receives something like fifteen thousand pounds now and as much more when her mother dies, I suppose? Adversity, you see, has made me practical, and I have learnt by starvation the value of money; I do not mean to starve again. Mrs. Laurence Carr has made a great marriage, rank and future wealth: she has less need of your money, and far less *right* to it than I have. I demand that you divide her fortune equally with me."

When he answered it was with great difficulty,

but clearly, resolutely; stopping every now and then to gather breath, but never from any indecision of purpose.

"What you ask is impossible. My daughter's fortune is already paid to her husband; I have told you, I do not recognize your right to demand anything of me. I was young when I loved your mother with all the fierceness of a first passion. She was many years older, and her nature was corrupt. She very nearly ruined me, for I would have given her all I possessed on earth. But that was little compared with the *other* injury. I trusted her, and she *deceived* me. The discovery of her treachery froze my whole nature, and it has never thawed: when I loved again, it was a better woman, and I suffered and sinned too, for *her* sake; but I was then a hardened man of the world. I was no longer capable of the devotion I had wasted on your mother: I had lost my faith in woman, and I looked on *success* in love as the legitimate prize of the persevering and adroit. You have seen me cold, cynical—I have grown more and more so every year; but this it was your mother

first made me. What I do for you is in expiation of my sins, and in pity for your position. But *claim* on me, you have none."

The thunder cloud that had been gathering on Sara's brow during the above speech, burst out in uncontrollable fury.

"You do wisely to insult my mother's memory at this moment! Coward! She died in abject misery, leaving me, a child, to the care of strangers, with no other inheritance than her revenge; while you—you, with a fresh crime upon your head, were revelling in wealth, and ——"

"I swear," interrupted the dying man, "that she never communicated with me, after I discovered her falseness and broke with her. Had she ever let me know she was in want——"

"Fine words!" scoffed Sara. "Fine words now that she is dead and gone! But they will not make me turn back from my purpose. Ha! you have shrunk from publicity these eighteen years past; your name shall be publicly branded now. You shall live long enough to see those you love best suffer through you: that *virtuous*

wife and daughter—I have another account to settle with the latter—they shall be brought to shame and dishonour, and thus——"

The dying man bounded up in his chair. He seemed possessed by some agent, independent of his own feeble strength, and beyond his control. His bony fingers grasped the girl by the throat so suddenly, that the veins started out on her forehead before she had time to step back and seize his wrists. For a second they stood thus —father and child—if, indeed, they were so, locked in a death-struggle, face to face.

It was a sight for fiends to witness, and rejoice over.

But death was already relaxing the fingers that had closed round the girl's throat. That momentary strength was spent, the flame that leapt in the socket had already died down, and he rolled back heavily upon the bed.

The door at the same instant was burst open, and the unhappy wife, rushing in, threw herself on her knees beside her husband, and buried her head in her hands.

"Henry! Courteney! I have heard all. No matter, dear, what becomes of *me*, I cannot long survive you; let her have what she wants, my money, *everything*, only, for God's sake! spare my child! Spare her this misery, this disgrace *now*. You would not hearken to me before, Courteney, when there was time to avert this misery. Oh, husband! as a last request, I implore you, leave us not to this creature's mercy! speak to me, promise me—make her swear——"

Suddenly a horrible suspicion flashed through her mind, and starting up, she brushed back the damp gray hair from his brow, with her quivering hand, exclaiming wildly, as she pressed her face close to his,—

"Look up! Look up! Speak to me once more! only once—Henry! Oh, my God! he is dead, and without a word!"

She gave a low, helpless cry, like a wounded bird, and fell forwards insensible upon the body.

* * * * *

The Creole girl stood there, immovable and pitiless as a Greek Fate over her victims.

"Foiled by death?" she muttered to herself, "No!" Her eye rested at that moment on the papers that lay scattered over the table before her. She swept them up into a heap, and carried them leisurely to her own room, before calling Marietta to Mrs. Courteney's assistance.

CHAPTER XXV.

"DEAR SIR,

"I HAVE the painful task of announcing to you the death of Mr. Courteney, which took place a few hours after your departure yesterday; and, in pursuance of the customs of this country, he was buried to-day.

"Mrs. Courteney has remained in a sort of stupor ever since her husband's death, unconscious of what passes around her; so that I have taken upon myself the necessary arrangements, and shall remain here until Mrs. Courteney is able to discuss a small matter of business between us. Were it not for this untoward event, I should no longer be an inmate of this house, as I had communicated to Mr. Courteney before he died the fact of my immediate removal from his protection. It

is probable, therefore, that on your return here, where your generous sympathy will doubtless lead you at once, I shall no longer be in Florence.

"It may be as well to mention, which I do with regret, that I have reason to fear Mr. Courteney has left his widow but poorly off—trusting, no doubt, to your kind and liberal sympathy for her support. Until you take measures for the same, the English apothecary (whose letter corroborating these statements I enclose) will generously attend on, and provide for your respected mother-in-law; and should you not see fit to make the necessary provision, which, after all, cannot be *expected* of you, the hospitals of Florence, I believe, are good.

"May I request the favour of your communicating this sad intelligence to Mrs. Carr? and, with the expression of my regard and esteem for yourself, believe me,

"Truly yours,

"SARA GISBORNE.

"*To the Hon. Laurence Carr.*"

The following was enclosed:—

"SIR,

"I WAS called in yesterday evening to see the body of Mr. Courteney. I found life had been extinct upwards of half-an-hour. Of his death from natural causes there can be no doubt, as his appearance confirmed all I knew before of his state of health. I regret to add that Mrs. Courteney's frame sustained so severe a shock in this sudden bereavement, that she has not yet recovered her consciousness, and is in a condition requiring the utmost care and attention: that with these she will recover—slowly but surely—I have no doubt. Unfortunately, the very admirable nurse she now has—a young lady whose exertions and fortitude throughout these trying scenes have been beyond praise—informs me that she will be under the painful necessity of leaving Florence in the course of a few days. Under these circumstances, sir, while I beg to assure you that Mrs. Courteney shall want for no attention at my hands, you will no doubt see the importance of her having some relative or friend

near her. Awaiting your wishes, I have the honour to be, sir,

"Yours faithfully,

"THOS. SARGENT."

"P.S.—I open this to say that the clergyman and I together have locked up, and set our seals upon all documents we have found belonging to the deceased."

Carr sat at breakfast in the Hôtel de l'Europe the morning after his arrival in Rome, when the above letters were handed to him by Giuseppe. Opposite him was his wife, fair and gentle creature, unsuspicious of all the sorrow that cover contained for her. The morning sun streamed in through the window at her back, kindling the outline of her soft brown hair into a natural glory of gold: it tipped with snow the edges of the white lace collar, and silvered the folds of her gray silk dress, that stood up sharply against the light. Carr looked at her, as her eye ran listlessly down the columns of *Galignani*, and a pang shot through his heart at the thought

of disturbing that picture of fair serenity with the cruel news he had to break.

Men are greater cowards than women at such moments. Carr would have given a great deal to be able to defer the evil hour; but he dared not. He knew it was necessary to prepare her, since it was clear at a glance that they must return at once to Florence. The death of Gilda's father could not be said to affect him otherwise than with an unacknowledged sense of relief. The account of Mrs. Courteney, however, filled him with honest sorrow; and he felt, very properly, that Gilda's place was by her mother's bed-side.

It was a great bore, of course, leaving Rome the day after one's arrival there, and the fourth of one's honeymoon, without having seen anything of the Eternal City! But, to his honour be it said, if this selfish regret flashed not unnaturally through Carr's mind as he sat there, it was quickly driven out by the image of that desolate and widowed lady, tended by strangers in her bed of sickness and, yearning for her child.

He never hesitated an instant as to the obligation of returning to her as fast as four horses could carry them: his only hesitation arose from his desire to spare Gilda as much anxiety as possible.

He read Sara's letter twice—three times before he could make up his mind to speak. The strange form of that communication—the almost studied heartlessness, with its thin crust of cold politeness, coming from one who was under such obligations to Mrs. Courteney, could not fail to strike Carr with surprise and disgust. It also rendered his breaking the news to Gilda more difficult, since it was impossible to give her the letter itself to read. Even Mr. Sargent's might alarm her unnecessarily as to her mother's state. He must make some excuse for keeping both from her, and soften the blow as much as might be, omitting all details. As to the supposition of Mrs. Courteney's being left destitute, he did not entertain it for a moment. The deceased man had scrupulously fulfilled his promises to Carr. The interest of the fifteen thousand settled on his wife had been placed to Carr's credit at

his banker's the day before his marriage. It was not to be believed, therefore, that the widow's portion had not been secured with the same rigid exactitude. It struck Carr—not indeed at the moment, but later—as singular, that any one should pretend to be acquainted with Mrs. Courteney's pecuniary position, since she had herself remained unconscious after her husband's death, and his papers were under lock and seal. As he revolved at his leisure the strange tenor of that letter, and asked himself what it might mean, he was also forcibly struck and puzzled by the cordial expressions—one would almost say of commiseration—towards himself,—a comparative stranger to the writer,—with which it closed, without so much as a word of sympathy to his wife!

But this critical examination of Miss Gisborne's composition, as I have said, came later, and when he was alone. The disagreeable impression it left generally on his mind was all he now knew. He folded it up carefully with the doctor's letter, and put it in his pocket.

She bore the news better than he expected. Her father's health had been such that she was familiarized with the idea of his probable death, and his increased weakness of late had additionally prepared her. She felt the natural grief of a young heart, when the first vacancy occurs in its narrow circle: him to whom she had hitherto looked for guidance, and knowledge, and advice she should behold no more. It cannot be said that he had endeared himself very strongly by any inward sympathy or outward demonstration to his daughter; but he was the law that governed and bound up that small household: his learning was held to be inexhaustible; his opinions and decrees knew no change. The influence of a powerful will and large, clear intellect had been felt thus by Gilda from a very early age. The loss to her was one which she knew could not be replaced. And to her poor mother—she dreaded to think of her!

Four hours later they were on the road back again to Florence. Throughout that melancholy journey, which they performed as rapidly as four

horses could carry them, with an occasional halt of an hour only, her husband's tenderness for her sorrow, his patient efforts to soothe and comfort her, touched Gilda profoundly; and the gentle pressure of her hand, as it lay within his, repaid Carr for all. It was a spontaneous movement which told that the young wife's heart was not insensible to the sacrifices he was making. Now Carr was one of those heroes capable of making sacrifices for a continuance, only when they are acknowledged.

They arrived at Florence very late in the following day. On driving up to Mrs. Courteney's, Carr was almost as much relieved as Gilda to hear that her mother was conscious, and out of danger. He was beginning to be afraid that he had not sufficiently prepared her for the state in which he expected to find Mrs. Courteney. She was sitting up, and received them with a calm which seemed almost unnatural. She looked wan and weak, though fragments of letters and papers around her gave evidence that she had already roused herself to one of the most painful tasks

consequent on death. To Carr it appeared as though, after the long tension of her nervous system, a reaction had taken place; that she had gone through too much to feel any longer acutely. After the severe shock, her mind was dulled to suffering, he believed; and was stunned, much as her frame was shattered, by the blow. Perhaps he was right. That a great change had come over her was certain. Was it the calm of resignation? Let us glance back at her a few hours previously and see.

When the Carrs arrived, it was seven o'clock. They learnt that at five Sara Gisborne had taken her departure. She had made her calculations with exactitude, and managed to have arranged her "matters of business" with Mrs. Courteney, just before it was possible for the Carrs to reach Florence.

"You are now sufficiently recovered, madam," said the exemplary young person of whom Mr. Sargent spoke in such warm praise, as she entered Mrs. Courteney's room with some papers in her hand. "You are now sufficiently recovered to

discuss business with me. Before we do so, and that I take my leave, may I beg that you will not forget to tell Mr. Laurence Carr that I nursed you carefully for five days and nights."

"Thank you, Sara," said Mrs. Courteney, gently.

"Perhaps your memory does not serve you accurately as to the events immediately preceding Mr. Courteney's—we will still *call* him Courteney—'s death? You then, with a just appreciation of my position, wished to make any sacrifice in order that my demands might be complied with. Are you still of the same mind, madam?"

"I am," she murmured.

"Here are certain coupons, bonds, and railway shares, amounting in all to nine thousand, eight hundred and fifty pounds, which it needs but a scratch of your pen to transfer from your name to mine. This will be a simpler method of carrying out Mr. Courteney's wishes, than your paying me the annuity of four hundred pounds, he proposed, and is slightly to your advantage, moreover."

"I understood," faltered Mrs. Courteney, "that —that it was *two* hundred pounds?"

"Your memory, as I expected, is at fault! No wonder! These lines, in Mr. Courteney's own hand, will serve to refresh it. Pray show the paper to Mr. Laurence Carr if he should make inquiries on the subject—that he may see you are only carrying out your late husband's wishes."

The paper she handed was indeed in the deceased gentleman's handwriting. It was a slight memorandum, intended for his wife, and penned a few hours before his death. After some minor injunctions and recommendations, it directed that the interest of ten thousand pounds should be paid annually to the "young person calling herself at present Sara Gisborne," and that sum devised to her upon Mrs. Courteney's death. It was altogether an informal document, hastily written, and intended only for his wife; when Sara's hand swept it, with the rest of the papers, from the table. One expert at discovering such frauds might have detected that a figure 1 had since

that time been inserted, and a 5 adroitly converted into an 0: but to the uninitiated, this was imperceptible, even on the closest inspection.

Mrs. Courteney was no fool. She had a conviction that her husband never intended what purported there to be his written intention. She knew him too well: even if her ears and her memory could have deceived her in the memorable interview she had overheard. Yet she took the paper passively, without questioning its authenticity. It *was* undoubtedly in his handwriting, and that was enough for her. Sick and weak, her brain troubled by one harassing doubt and anxiety, she felt herself relieved thus of a heavy responsibility. The gift of two thirds of her fortune would reduce her to penury, but if she purchased tranquillity for her child at this price, was not the bargain a cheap one? For herself, no one so indifferent to poverty—more so than ever at that moment, when all her worn and weary heart asked for was *rest*.

She took the pen in her trembling fingers, but ere signing the first deed which Sara placed

before her, she paused and looked up, her eyes filled with tears.

"Sara, I have never done you any harm; or, if I have, it was unintentional. I would have loved you, if you had allowed me, but you would not. Your animosity for real or fancied wrongs has been bitter. Say that it is wiped out, before I sign this; that you will not visit it upon the innocent and unoffending."

"To you individually, madam," said Sara, carelessly, "I have never had any particular animosity. And, at all events, your just restitution of a portion of that fortune which should have been my mother's, will clear off the score between us."

"And my child, Gilda? You understand me."

"If Mrs. Laurence Carr does not cross my path, I shall leave her at peace. If my plans are not thwarted, you and she are safe, madam, and will never hear of me again, which is, no doubt, what you devoutly hope. This I will swear to you, if you wish it."

"It is enough," said Mrs. Courteney, as she

signed her name. "If your mind were not so jaundiced, my poor girl, you would know that we neither of us *have* ever thwarted, or could desire to thwart, your views; and that, far from not wishing to hear of you, we should like to know that your married life was better, and calmer, and happier, than your girlhood has been. God help us all, Sara! This is a difficult world. I am the last woman that should be hard on another. God forgive us both!"

A momentary softness stole into the hard black eyes of the Creole girl, as she listened to those tender and womanly words. But she crushed it out and stamped on it at once. No relaxation of resolve for her! What had she to do now with human sympathy? Passion and ambition; all else had died and been buried in her mother's grave.

She gathered up the papers without reply; and while Mrs. Courteney sank back on the pillow, exhausted with the exertion of talking and writing, Sara left the room.

Half an hour later, she returned to wish her

good-by. It was an ordinary act of courtesy, performed in the most ordinary way. She declined to give her address; to state where she was going, or by what name she was henceforward to be known. She left a polite message for Mr. Laurence Carr, with a short note.

And thus the two women parted, never to meet again in this world.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Two days elapsed. Mrs. Courteney gained strength rapidly. On the third morning she was able to leave her room, and take her place on the sofa in the *sala*. Carr happened to be alone there, and was glad of the opportunity of speaking to his mother-in-law without the presence of his wife. To say the truth, he was not altogether in the most equable state of mind. Gilda had confided to him with tears in her eye that morning that her mother was going to send away all her servants: her reduced means would not admit of her keeping them. Carr himself had not been called upon to investigate the state of Mr. Courteney's affairs; the seals had been broken, and every paper examined by the widow herself. He now felt an uncomfortable suspicion that Miss

Gisborne's information was correct. Her last note consisted of these words,—

"I LEAVE Mrs. Courteney, dear sir, with no anxiety as to her health. As to her future comfort and well-being, were you not at hand to see that they suffer no reduction from her change of fortunes, I should be indeed unhappy. But however tried and deceived, your generosity will succour her, I am persuaded.

"Faithfully yours,

"S. G."

Carr knew no more what to make of this letter than the first. He had questioned Mrs. Courteney, and then Gilda, more particularly as to the writer. From the latter the account he received was unsatisfactory enough, and she spoke of Sara with a severity very unlike Gilda in general. Mrs. Courteney was more vague and more lenient in her manner. She mentioned Sara's unremitting attention during her own illness; but the subject was evidently painful to her, and she avoided it as much as possible.

Carr was annoyed and puzzled by the tone of these notes. The half-pity they seemed to express for him was especially irritating; and since this intelligence of his wife's, he resolved to broach the subject boldly to Mrs. Courteney, and learn the actual truth.

"I fear, from what Gilda tells me," he began, "that your husband's affairs have been left in some disorder. Will you let me assist you in looking over and arranging his papers?"

"Thank you, Laurence," she answered gently. "They are in perfect order. You are aware that Mr. Courteney left no will. He told you so, I believe, when he divided his fortune? His only instructions are contained on a slip of paper, addressed to me."

"But—but, since you have, by this division, between five and six hundred a year, why, let me ask, should it be necessary for you to reduce, so suddenly, your establishment?"

"It *is* necessary—no matter why—but you need not pity me. My plans are already arranged. There is an Italian lady living at

Forli, whom I know well. I shall go to her. Those quiet towns where strangers seldom pass, and never reside, are very cheap, and to me one place is the same as another."

"Mrs. Courteney," said Carr, rather heatedly, "do you not place enough confidence in me to say candidly what this drain upon your income is, that reduces you from comparative affluence to poverty?"

"It is from no want of confidence in you that I shrink from the subject, Laurence; but, because it is a painful as well as a useless one to discuss. In a word, more than half the fortune you suppose me to possess, is already in the hands of another person. This person had a strong claim on Mr. Courteney; there is the paper he left—read it. Ask me no more questions—the thing is done beyond recall; and if you would oblige me, never allude again to the subject."

He took the paper and read it with amazement, strongly mingled, it must be confessed, with indignation. It was hardly credible that Mr. Courteney should have left his wife thus

burdened and impoverished! And what was the tie strong enough to induce him to act thus? Ay, what! The more he thought of it, the more mysterious and difficult to believe it seemed. Yet *there* was the document in his own handwriting; and there was his widow acknowledging and acting upon the same. It was outrageous!

Then he began to think how he was personally affected by this discovery, and made out for himself a strong case of grievance. He considered himself *done*. Of course it was impossible he could leave his wife's mother in abject poverty —the dead man had calculated on that. It is true the promised dowry had been punctually paid; but instead of complete independence, here he found himself saddled with a very heavy charge! He forgot, as men often do under like circumstances, how often and how strongly he had deprecated the idea of being influenced by his wife's money, and how he had requested that it might be settled entirely on herself, and placed beyond his control.

Had this been recalled to his mind, and the manifest inconsistency of his present complaint pointed out, it is not improbable that Carr would have intrenched himself behind a whole barrier of specious arguments to prove that he was not called upon in any way to spend his wife's money upon his wife's mother. Fortunately, all his better feelings were allowed to have full play. There was no one to advise him to do the right thing. His irritation had time to cool down.

"E un' arma spesso il non averne,"

says an Italian poet. There sat the widow, pale and helpless in her weeds, opposite, asking nothing of him, but, on the contrary, accepting her poverty with a simple dignity and self-respect that could not fail to touch Carr at last. He recognized in her very reserve which had angered him, that instinct of delicacy which shrank from making her position known to her son-in-law.

After the lapse of a few minutes, he went up, and held out both hands.

"Your home must be with us for the present, Mrs. Courteney. When we leave Italy—Gilda and I—we will talk more about your future residence. Until then you must make up your mind to live in our tent, wherever it may be pitched. I will hear nothing. I will take no excuse! Gilda's happiness would be destroyed, if she knew you were living in solitude and misery at a wretched little place like Forli. I could not allow it. I am clothed in a little brief authority, you see, as your daughter's husband, and I choose to exercise it. As to this memorandum," he added, in a graver tone, "I accept it for what you say it is—the expression of Mr. Courteney's last wishes. I forbear to make any comment, or to ask any question on the subject. I shall endeavour to forget it from this moment, and only wish the provisions of it were such as to enable *you* to do so."

Carr could say and do things too, you perceive, in the true and chivalrous spirit of a gentleman. Pity that the many small defects that had gathered on his character, like an accumulation of fine dust

on machinery, so often impeded the action of its wheels.

Mrs. Courteney's eyes filled with tears, and she pressed Carr's hand warmly: but she remained firm for a long time to her original intention. It needed all Gilda's entreaties, and Carr's persuasive arguments—reiterated with additional force for several days—to induce her to abandon it. But the more she resisted, the more resolved Carr was to carry through his magnanimous intentions. She had to yield finally against her *instincts*, rather than her judgment; for after all, was it not a natural and obvious course? Her daughter's husband was disposed to treat her as a mother; why should she estrange herself from them? She knew how Gilda loved her, and she determined, with the rare wisdom of experience, to influence her child as little as possible; to live as much within herself as might be, and never to stand between husband and wife. If, after this, she detected the smallest shade of discord arise, which might be traced to her presence, she was resolved that nothing should induce her to remain. Yet

even when these rules of action were laid down, her dead husband's advice recurred to her over and over again, with painful, cruel distinctness. Were it not wiser to make the wrench at once and for ever, that must sooner or later separate her from her child?

It may be supposed that Carr was anxious to know what tone his father and mother would now adopt towards him; and, in truth, he was all the more so, that he did not write, and said nothing on the subject to any one. After his marriage he had written one brief letter announcing the fact, and then followed a long silence on either side. Circumstances, in the meantime, were favouring him; the complication of Lord Carrlyon's affairs was serious, and without more energy and resolution than the old man possessed, it was difficult to right them. Carr's unfortunate marriage at this juncture (instead of allying himself with "money," as of course he ought to have done) was to be bitterly deplored; but in any sort of rupture with his son, or open expression of his displeasure when Carr's signature was so

necessary to him, Lord Carrlyon could not have indulged, even had he felt so inclined. Poor hampered, harassed old man! what with his lawyers, and creditors, and overbearing wife, he had a hard time of it just then. Lady Carrlyon it was who prevented his writing at once to their delinquent son. She had a violent bilious attack, brought on by her rage at the frustration of all her most cherished schemes, and in her impotent wrath, forbade Lord Carrlyon from answering the prodigal's letter. But as the bilious attack passed away, and a *mens sana in corpore sano* returned to the worldly-wise woman, a conviction of the utter futility of this line of conduct grew on her. If anything could redeem her Laurence—could retrieve the past—it must be done by other means, and not just at present. Wait till the first fever of passion is past—till reason has resumed her sway: then who knows but some flaw, some informality, may be found in this disgraceful marriage, contracted with such suspicious haste? So whispered prudence; and the proud woman gnawed her heart-strings, and wrote

to her son. Unlike her more unpremeditated effusions, it was an astute composition, in which mild sorrowful surprise yielded to the loving mother's hope that, as the step was taken, it might conduce to her son's happiness. This letter was accompanied by one from his father, saying very little about the marriage, and a great deal about the Carrlyon estate.

The packet reached Carr at Florence soon after the interview I have recorded with Mrs. Courteney, and about a month after his marriage. It made him very happy, and Gilda observed that the cloud which had hung over his brow more than once of late, was completely dispelled this morning.

"Shall we spend next winter at Carrlyon, Gilda?" he asked, as he stooped over her chair and kissed her forehead.

A number of contending feelings made tumult in the young wife's breast, but she replied with her sweet smile, while the colour rose to her cheeks,—

"Oh, yes; if *they* wish it, Laurence, by all means let us go."

In truth, she had grown not unnaturally to think of Carr's home and his parents with something like dread. The few words that had dropped from her husband now and then had not been reassuring: the absence of all communication with his family seemed strangely cold to the warm-hearted girl, and when speaking of it to her mother, the latter prepared her to expect anything but a cordial welcome from the house of Carrlyon.

"But," added Mrs. Courteney, "a husband and wife must be all in all to each other; and if Laurence is sincerely attached to you, as I believe him to be, and you continue as happy together as you are now, dearest child, no matter what happens. All the world besides is of no moment compared with *that*."

Yes, he was sincerely attached to her; there was no doubt of it. This was not a mere passing fancy, which wore away with possession. But, remembering the circumstances under which he was accepted, it may be asked, was he contented with the amount of affection it was in his wife's power

to bestow on him in return? He was naturally of a jealous temperament: the proverbial staring of Italians incensed him beyond measure; and he was near horse-whipping a young artist, who, attracted by the fair hair and sweet young English face, ventured to request that she would sit to him, as Gilda stood watching him copy in the gallery one day.

The recollection of Guido Lamberti was put away from him as far as possible. They never spoke, and never heard of the young Bolognese. His name by tacit consent was avoided in the small family circle, for it was but natural to imagine that it was not a very agreeable one to Laurence Carr. He could not bear to think that Gilda had ever loved the Italian. In fact, whenever he thought on the subject, he declared it was not the case: it was but a girlish fancy which sentimentality had exaggerated into a passion. Yet, with a very common inconsistency, he was jealously on the look-out for any symptom that should indicate the existence of such passion still.

For the present it is necessary to say but little of the state of Gilda's own heart. These were early days. She was very grateful for her husband's devotion, and his tenderness to her mother; very anxious to please him, and for the rest tranquil and passive. The seeds were sown, no doubt, of that affection whose growth, like moss, is unperceived. Alas! like moss, too, it never would do more than cover the *surface* of her being. The passion-flowers within had been torn up ere they had come to maturity, and trampled under foot. When she thought of Lamberti, it was as of something long since passed away, belonging to another period of existence. The idle dreams of that time had fled for ever. Feelings of an unlike character were growing up daily stronger in her now; and she strove with all her heart to shut out idle retrospection.

That handsome young couple in deep mourning attracted, indeed, universal attention. They were daily to be seen sauntering through the Uffizi or Pitti Palace, and on sunny afternoons driving to one or other of the princely villas that surround

Florence. Sometimes Mrs. Courteney accompanied them; but she was always ready with an excuse to leave them together, and anxious that they should be dependent on each other's society alone.

Except two or three of the young men belonging to the embassy, they knew no one, and Carr, in his present frame of mind, was not anxious to encourage the visits of these acquaintances. His wife's deep mourning was sufficient plea for the reclusive life they led, and Carr at once declined any intercourse with the few English who, undismayed by the signs of coming tempest, lingered in Florence.

The carnival was over. The customary boisterous merriment of maskers had struggled under an ominous gloom, and the low thunder in the distance had made itself heard through the sound of tabret and dulcimer. And now, on the other hand, the sackcloth and ashes of Lent scarcely suited the fiercely excited temper of the Tuscan capital. Fair Florentine dames, whose morality sat lightly on them during ten months in the year,

and who, in the ordinary course of things, retired to convents, and were busy making their salvation at this season, were now in a fever of patriotic excitement. On the 17th of February the Tuscan constitution was promulgated, and the anomaly of an Austrian liberal grand-duke was presented to the world. This was only a link in the chain of reaction which was being rapidly passed from city to city throughout the peninsula. Terror-stricken *Bomba*—after the Sicilian revolution, where his merciless cannonadings earned him the name by which he will be handed down to posterity,—King Bomba in his abject terror, promising anything and everything to his revolted Neapolitans, was a spectacle at which all Italy rejoiced. Every day news arrived of some fresh demonstration of popular feeling in the cities writhing under Austrian rule. From Milan it was an address circulated among the youths of all classes, inviting the population to follow the example of the Americans, who abolished the use of tea in order to avoid paying the tax to England.

"Give up tobacco, and all voluntary taxation," was the exhortation of the Milanese patriots. From Venice it was the deliverance of Daniel Manin and Tommasso from prison by the hands of the people, and the cry of "Morte ai Tedeschi!" The overthrow of the Orleans dynasty in France,—insurrection at Vienna,—a Roman constitution granted by Pio Nono,—intelligence of these and other moves rapidly following each other on the great political chess-board, kept Florence in a ferment.

If Carr had ever been a luke-warm liberal, he at all events now heartily adopted his wife's politics, and was sanguine for the emancipation of Italy. They lingered on in Florence until the spring should have fully burst, and they should be driven northwards to seek shelter from the heat. Every evening during this time he sauntered into the Café Doni, and mingled with one of the knots of free-spoken republicans, who were discussing the news of the day. The latest rumours current were thus brought back to the tea-table, where mother and daughter anxiously awaited his return.

At last the long-gathering thunder burst. On the 18th of March the great revolt of Milan broke out, and five days later Radetzki and the Austrian garrison were compelled to retire.

And here it is necessary that we should turn aside for a space, to consider what had become, meantime, of the other actors in this story.

PART II.

VILLA FOSSOMBRONI.

PART II.

VILLA FOSSOMBRONI.

CHAPTER I.

The circumstances which agitated Italy at this time are fresh in every one's recollection. It is unnecessary to do more than allude to them, when they intersect the lives of the people I am writing about. I hold the teller of stories generally mistaken when he ascends into the region of history; and the careless reproduction of opinions, artistically suited to the conduct of the tale, tends, in too many cases, to perpetuate error. Thus my own Italian tendencies, and the political faith of both my heroes, shall not induce me to repeat the ill-authenticated stories of Radetzki's cruelty, nor

indulge in any Mazzinian diatribes against the luckless Charles Albert. As for Pio Nono and King Bomba, are not their tergiversations written in the memories of men? Let them rest in peace.

Guido Lamberti had not miscalculated time and place. He was at Milan some weeks before the match was laid to the train which speedily fired the whole peninsula, and joined that band of young men by whom the irritation of public feeling against the Austrians was so greatly fomented. On the 18th March the revolt broke out; and during the bloody days that followed, the Bolognese gentleman was to be seen fighting beside his Lombard companions of all ranks, and recklessly exposing his life, as it seemed, at the barricades. His rifle—one of the three hundred fire-arms which were all the patriots of Milan could muster—did good service, while the Austrian bullets fell harmless around him. On the 21st, as we all know, Radetzki was compelled to retreat; and Como, Brescia, Bergamo, and the Italian Alps, answering the summons of the revolted city, sent forth volunteers to join the Milanese in expelling

the detested Austrians. The first step was gained, but it was only the first. The Milanese were mistaken in fancying the victory already won.

Companies of volunteers were speedily formed, and in one of these Guido Lamberti enrolled himself. In the petty engagements that followed during the next few weeks Italian superstition was not slow to pronounce that Count Lamberti bore a charmed life, though it was one to which he seemed to attach but little value. However that might be, he did not purposely expose it. Life had indeed lost all charm, all colour for him; he could look forward to nothing with any vivid sense of possible pleasure; but the great aim of his existence yet remained unaccomplished, and to that he now applied himself with undivided soul and strength. The state of his mind was such as finds relief from over-stress of thought in vigorous action alone. The tension of every nerve and muscle in his body, the necessary rapidity of eye, and promptitude of hand were vents to a strong inward excitement. Above all, the desire to stimulate by his own daring the crowd of youths

around him carried Guido away. "The young Lamberti has every qualification to make a good captain but one," remarked a veteran, shaking his head, "he has no self-command." Yet this was the same Guido so fatally controlled by his mistaken pride hitherto! But in such inconsistency is nature justified of her children.

Whenever he had time to recur to himself and his own lot, he was wretched. Nature *will* make herself heard sooner or later, drown her voice as you will by the sophistry of any principle that is not founded on *truth*. There were times—mostly in the long silent hours of the night—when the young man's heart gave way, and he almost renounced the stubborn prejudices in which he had been early trained. Were not a man's heart and conscience the only tribunals he should recognize? Was it not a moral cowardice to regard what *might* be said or thought of him? And was this lofty pride of independence worth the sacrifice of a life's (nay, might it not be *two* lives') happiness? He could hardly doubt, after that last interview with Mrs. Courteney, that Gilda had not been wholly

indifferent to him; and her sweet pale face, as he had beheld it for the last time, seemed to look down on him reproachfully as he lay there on the floor, wrapped in his heavy cloak, and surrounded in the dim firelight by his sleeping companions.

Then the old pride would again assert its sway, not unmingled with bitterness at a fate against which there was now no hope—no appeal!

From this conflict of feeling the necessity of rousing himself to action was a boon and a relief. Among the questions daily discussed there were the momentous ones: what government was to succeed to the existent state of things in Italy?, and whether republicans ought to fight under the Piedmontese standard, with no other prospect than the old patch-work of petty sovereignties throughout the peninsula, swept of Austrians and *sbirri*, and garnished with a constitution apiece. Mazzini (and Mazzini was revered at that time, be it remembered, by all liberals) had ceded to the idea of a "united kingdom of Italy," but did not encourage his followers to uphold the thrones of such potentates as Leopold and Bomba. Charles Albert, on

the other hand, could hardly enter into any compact against his patriot allies as they then were, still less so against the watchword of their party, Pio Nono. It is true the Pope's allocution very soon afterwards shook public confidence in his professions; and in Ferdinand of Naples there never can be said to have been any. Still the Roman and Neapolitan armies were on the march to assist in the great national war. Charles Albert could not ignore this, and while the liberal party placed no faith in oaths forced from the reluctant lips of the Italian princes, it was impossible for the king to decline their aid, or to assent to the stipulations which the Mazzinians wished to force on him.

Guido Lamberti, as we know, was a republican. A citizen of the Roman States, he was no lover of the Papacy, and found it hard to believe that any good thing could come out of the chair of St. Peter. But he felt that all differences of political faith or judgment were merged in the first, great, and pressing duty towards his country. To rid the soil of the Austrian, that was the first thing—for men of all shades of opinion to

co-operate in this, and leave the vexed questions of internal government to be settled hereafter. Had more been of his mind, the great movement of '48 had not failed, as it assuredly did, for lack of unity and concentrated vigour.

From Bologna—his beloved Bologna—Lamberti had almost daily intelligence through the professor. The countess, wrote that worthy man, was as well as continued fast and mortification would allow; she sighed whenever she spoke of her son: but she found comfort in the reflection that he had an image of the Virgin round his neck, which she had hung there herself when he was a boy. His preservation was no doubt owing to this. The patriotic enthusiasm of the city, Garofalo said, knew no bounds. Sympathy with their brethren in the north was expressed in addresses, subscriptions, the raising of volunteer corps, and the departure of many of the leading young men to join the standard of Charles Albert. Among the latter, Garofalo mentioned Count Razzi. The Marchesa Onofrio, too, was departed towards the seat of war, with the view of nursing the prospec-

tive wounds of the Piedmontese cousin, it was supposed.

One portion of this intelligence Guido had already forestalled some time before. In the first fighting days of Milan, he and Razzi came across each other, and exchanged a warm grasp of the hand in the midst of that excited scene. He met him afterwards in *cafés* and other public places, and the two Bolognese gentlemen were subsequently attached to the same division of the army. During the early periods of this intercourse, Guido was struck by a certain degree of mystery, which, being so at variance with his frank gay character, seemed to oppress Razzi when alluding to himself, his position, and prospects. Guido did not appear to remark it, and avoided thenceforward any indirect approach to a subject which evidently embarrassed his friend. Had he, indeed, felt any great curiosity on the subject, or been moved by other motives, it is more than probable that the other's awkward reticence would have yielded to the smallest amount of pressure. As it was, a circumstance

ere long afforded to Guido the clue he was far from seeking.

More than once during the five days' fighting at the barricades, Guido's attention had been momentarily drawn to the figure of a slight, dark youth, dressed in a gray jacket, his short wavy hair surmounted by a cap of the same colour. He carried a revolver in his belt, and a light carbine slung across his shoulder. It was his dexterity in the employment of this latter weapon which attracted Guido's notice. The youth certainly could not be said to expose himself unnecessarily to the enemy's fire. He generally established his position behind a heap of paving-stones, or under cover of a wall; whence, with the utmost *sang-froid*, he took deliberate aim, picked off his man, and reloaded. The gallantry might be small; the skill and the success were eminent. In the glimpses which Guido caught of the boy's profile there was something not altogether unfamiliar, he fancied; but he had not time to give the subject a second thought. With the shades of evening, the youth

always disappeared, and was to be seen neither in the streets nor *cafés*. In the mad rejoicings consequent on the expulsion of the Austrians from Milan, Guido remembered afterwards never to have come across him. But one evening while passing through one of the *piazze*, he was arrested by the sound of a rich, harmonious voice, pouring forth with all the impassioned eloquence of Italy the then popular hymn of "Pio Nono." A crowd had gathered under the open window, and their enthusiasm was noisily expressed in the chorus they made at the end of each couplet. Their vivas and plaudits at the termination of the whole drew the singer somewhat reluctantly, as it seemed, to the window. Though it was not possible to see his face, Lamberti recognized, or fancied he recognized, the outline of the figure against the light as that of the youth in gray. The voice, too, strange to say, haunted him as one he had heard before. Whether the singer had, on his side, recognized a friend among the upturned faces in the dimly-lit piazza below, or whether gratified vanity alone prompted the display, there

was no telling; but he brought his guitar to the window, and with redoubled fire and pathos he sang one patriotic song after another, until the excitement of the increasing crowd below became tumultuous and almost alarming. Then the singer, bowing his head, closed the window and withdrew.

The corps to which Guido and Razzi both belonged was soon afterwards attached to the Sardinian army. They left Milan, and took part in most of the sharp skirmishes and petty engagements which followed. In one of these—Monzambano, or some other,—Guido was, for the first time, strangely and unexpectedly brought face to face with that mysterious youth in gray.

It was a hand-to-hand fight across a bridge, I have heard him say. The Austrians were retreating, but disputed every inch of the ground. Just as he had disarmed a young officer, and was making him his prisoner, Guido found himself seized in the grasp of a giant double his own weight, who, attracted by the conspicuous gallantry of the young count, had borne down

everything before him, resolved to precipitate his enemy overy the bridge. The danger was imminent. Guido's hands being otherwise employed at the moment, he was, spite of his great strength, almost powerless in the grapple of those mighty arms that closed like a vice round him. There was a sharp, violent struggle, for a few seconds only: Guido vainly straining every muscle to free himself while he was heaved up towards the parapet. At that instant, even while tottering on the brink, a pistol was discharged full in the broad, heavy, fair-bearded face, thrust so close to his own, and the Austrian's brains were scattered over him. Guido staggered back, and his eyes met those of his deliverer, as the youth in gray, with a strange smile of triumph, returned the pistol to his belt, and slipped back into the crowd.

And Guido recognized him!

CHAPTER II.

THE Laurence Carrs had at last left Florence, and were bending their steps northwards. Undismayed by the fact of its being the theatre of war, they were to pass the summer in the neighbourhood of the Lago di Garda. An Italian acquaintance of Carr's, who was far too much alarmed to think of occupying his villa there, under the present aspect of the country, offered it to Carr for a very small "con-sideration." The state of the Laurence Carr finances was such as to render any expensive residence for the summer undesirable. The fine apartment on the Lung' Arno, the carriage and horses, the pictures and *pietre dure* which Carr had found irresistible: these in four months had eaten already a large hole in the year's income. I have said that he

had never been recklessly extravagant, and never addicted to expensive vices; but the heir of the Carrlyons had the vaguest ideas of squaring income and expenditure, and towards the end of his sojourn in Florence was dismayed at the aspect of his cheque-book. He would sooner starve than make any application to his father; from his mother-in-law he was naturally still more anxious to conceal the tightened state of the money market. He kept his own counsel, but he made up his mind they must go, and really "economize" somewhere: there was no help for it. And at this juncture, it so happened, that the villa for a "*con*-sideration" was offered to him. It was described as spacious, and beautifully situated — surrounded by its own vineyards, and overlooking the Lake of Garda. The picture, in short, was painted in glowing oil colours; and if one was disposed to overlook the ugly crack across it (namely, that the contending armies would probably be encamped in its immediate vicinity), no doubt it was a tempting proposal. Carr *was* disposed to overlook it;

neither his wife nor mother-in-law had any fears, but on the contrary rejoiced to be nearer to the theatre of all their hopes and sympathies. The bargain was struck, and towards the middle of May they left Florence.

The Villa Fossombroni lay about a day's march beyond Peschiera. Their journey so far, a tedious *vetturino* affair, performed not without difficulties, and by many a circuitous route in avoidance of yet greater ones, was at last accomplished. They had meant to keep aloof from this, one of the four great fortresses of Venetian Lombardy, which was then besieged by the Italian army; but news of its fall, simultaneously with Charles Albert's victory at Goïto, reached them on the way. Ambulance-carts with the wounded and the dying,—files of prisoners in the white, blood-stained uniform of Austria,—couriers, orderlies, vehicles of every description moving in dim clouds of dust along the stony road—proclaimed the triumphant news. Peschiera had fallen! All Italy rang with the cry.

"Why should we turn aside from Peschiera

now?" said Gilda, her eyes lighted up with enthusiasm. "It is in the hands of our friends, and oh! Laurence, perhaps we might be of use to some of the poor wounded people! Mamma and I have made a whole trunkful of lint. Look at that unfortunate boy carried along, both arms shot off!" she added, shuddering, "and the old man beside him! how they are jolted along! It is horrible. Can't we do anything for them? Let us stop; do, Laurence! It is inhuman to let them suffer so!"

"My dear child, they wouldn't stop for us. They're taking them to the hospital at Goïto—shot in some of the distant outposts, I suppose—or else they are too full at Peschiera to take them in. Perhaps, by-the-by, there may not be room for *us* in the place."

"Let us try; we can but go on, if it is so. Don't refuse me." She looked into his face, pleadingly. "It seems so unnatural to be sitting here at our ease, cautiously avoiding all this misery, that we might do something to alleviate. Do tell him so, mamma."

But Mrs. Courteney was silent, and Carr replied smiling,

"You're not made for a hospital, Gilda. Why, you turned quite white just now at the sight of a little blood. You'd be more in their way than of any service, I suspect. A horrid confusion, depend on it."

"If Laurence objects to your going, and I think he is right, my child," said her mother, hastily, "I will get into a caratella, and go on by myself to Peschiera. I can easily rejoin you in a few days at Fossombroni; and there is no danger for *my* nerves *now* you know," she added, smiling.

"No," repeated her daughter, more earnestly than before. "I cannot agree to that, mother. Laurence will not refuse me, I know. I am not so weak and foolish as he thinks; and I want to prove to him that I *can* be of some use. Dear Laurence, I shall be miserable if you won't consent to our all going on to Peschiera!" and she looked up, with her sweet, excited face so pleadingly, that the young fool *did* consent.

Ah! had he known that his more characteristic obstinacy would have been far better for all their future happiness at that moment!

The state of the newly-liberated fortress justified Carr's anticipations. The wretched little place was crammed to overflowing. The Duke of Genoa's staff, and the chief officers of the division, occupied the few dirty houses of entertainment, or were billeted on the principal citizens. Tricolor flags, ribands, and garlands interwoven with mottoes, fluttered from every window, which were occupied by women, young and old, in flaming gala dresses. The narrow streets below were filled almost wholly by men, and of these the larger proportion of course were soldiers.

"Well! this looks promising," said Carr, resignedly, as the vetturino heaved and struggled up the street between the mob of soldiery, attracting some small notice by reason of its peaceful-looking convoy.

"This looks promising! It reminds me of the night I arrived in Bologna, only this is considerably worse. We shall have to pass the

night in the street, I foresee. By Jove! Here we *are* at a full stop. What are we to do? Giuseppe! Giuseppe! what the deuce is the fellow up to? He has run off into the crowd like a mad dog. Well! my dear Gilda, I congratulate you on the success of your idea! We shall *all* be driven to the hospital to earn a shelter, evidently."

"Here comes Giuseppe, with a radiant face," said Gilda, putting her head out of window, "but who is the lady with him? Do you see? with a white bournous? Surely, I know her face."

"The Onofrio! by all that's wonderful!" cried Carr, bursting out laughing, as he leapt from the carriage. "Well, this is lucky. I give Giuseppe credit for that move. Marchesa, overjoyed to see you. Who would have thought of meeting here? If you can find us a place to lay our heads, we are your slaves for life."

"I have found you one already," said the kindly Italian, laughing, as she shook him warmly by the hand. "But come, introduce me, *en règle*, to your wife and her mother, and then you wil.

all come with me. I only arrived here a few hours ago myself," she continued, after the ceremony had been decorously gone through, "from Goïto, and I am with my old aunt, Madame Santi, who has a house here. She has not *above* four officers billeted on her, and shall find rooms for you, I engage."

They descended from the carriage, leaving it to follow as best it might, while they threaded the crowd until they reached Madame Santi's house.

On their way thither the marchesa could not resist saying,

"You English are a strange people—never happy unless you are in the midst of everything. What brings you here, *caro mio?*"

"Well," replied Carr, laughing, "the fact is, I am *henpecked*—a state of things you don't believe in here, eh? My wife was bent on visiting the hospital, and seeing if she could do anything for the poor fellows—so I yielded with the best grace I could."

"Brava! signora!" the marchesa turned round with an encouraging little nod, "brava! we sadly

want help in all departments. Our poor volunteers! scarcely fed, and many of them not lodged at all! *Quei maledetti Tedeschi* have ravaged the whole country, so that there is little left for them; and as to the commissariat," she added, dropping her voice, "however, the less said on that subject the better! Your countrywomen are all good nurses, are they not? well! so shall we Italians be in the course of time. We wanted a good war to rouse our energies. You've heard about that dear Belgiojoso, haven't you? *O Dio mio! che generosa, nobile creatura!* She has levied five hundred Neapolitans herself, and brought them with her —— Ah! if we had more such women!"

They had by this time reached the Casa Santi, one of the few tolerable houses in the place, and were conducted by the marchesa into a sala, where two officers were composedly smoking their cigars over the remains of the mid-day meal. The room was still hermetically sealed against a possible ray from the afternoon sun, and the atmosphere was consequently suffocating with tobacco-smoke and the savour of departed vianda. Flies of every

description blackened the walls and ceiling and swarmed over the table-cloth, where they fought over fragments of sugar, and the *membra disjecta* of a fowl.

Madame Santi was a sharp little old lady, very unlike an Italian in appearance, having a light brown front,—which might be presumed to afford some distant clue to the colour of her own locks, when she had any—and very shrewd gray eyes. She was full of animation, and wore a tricoloured bow in her cap. The influx of unexpected visitors seemed in no way to disconcert her—as it probably would have done most English ladies. She received them very cordially, showed them a couple of bare chambers, with painted ceilings, and said the servants must manage as best they could in the kitchen. She suggested no difficulties, and made no apologies, which was the surest way of setting the strangers at their ease.

As to remaining beyond the night at Peschiera, under such circumstances, beholden to this lady for hospitality, it was, of course, not to be thought of. Carr took an opportunity of saying this to his

wife, and added, that as it was then past six o'clock, she and her mother had better not delay their visit to the hospital, if they were bent on it.

"I'll take you there; but you won't ask me to go in? I've no vocation for dressing wounds, I will smoke my cigar round the fortifications, and call for you later."

"We are not afraid of walking by ourselves in Italy," said Gilda, quietly. "If you don't like to come in, mamma and I can find our way back perfectly, Laurence."

Carr was not in the best of humours, and this answer of his wife's did not please him.

"Oh! as you like. I am quite aware that you used to walk about Bologna by yourselves: but you will find that Englishwomen in society don't *generally* think it advisable to do so after dusk, especially in a place crammed with soldiers. But if you don't want me, say so, by all means."

"My dear Laurence, you misunderstood me," said Gilda, distressed. "I only meant that you

should not worry yourself about us, if you did not like to——"

"Come!" said the marchesa, entering quickly. "Come, children! let us take our *café noir* and be off. I shall leave you, signora, at the hospital, for I am more at home among the fleshpots of Egypt, which I am carrying to our poor volunteers, than with poultices and bandages. I don't understand much about medicine, you see; I take a dose once a month, and am bled occasionally to purify the system; but as to anything else, I have always had the best health, I am glad to say, and I don't understand sick people. They pretend that I nearly killed a poor fellow the other day, because I poured half a bottle of *chianti* down his throat; I thought he wanted strength, but it appears he was in a fever, so since then I am very cautious, and devote myself principally to those whom *my* system can't kill."

Notwithstanding which disclaimer, the warm-hearted woman had been indefatigable on every battlefield in alleviating, as far as she could, the sufferings of the wounded, until they were

transmitted into other hands. She now—as the caretta below, laden with meat, bread, and wine, testified—was devoting her substance to some of those who, though unwounded, had borne the burden and heat of the day.

CHAPTER III.

They stopped at the door of a long, low building, and here the marchesa and Carr left mother and daughter, Carr proposing to call for them in a couple of hours.

Within, the greatest confusion appeared to reign. There were not near hands enough for the necessary work, and surgeons, assistants, and nurses, were running to and fro with all the noisy gesticulation of Italians, which, added to the piercing shrieks of some of the unfortunate sufferers, rendered it a perfect Babel. The two ladies, each laden with a heavy parcel, tried in vain for some time to obtain any information as to the part of the building to which they were to direct their steps. Avoiding the wards where any serious operations were being performed, and

to which, of course, the surgeons' and nurses' care would be principally given, Gilda and her mother entered one to which a young surgeon at last directed them, adding that there were some bad cases in it to which he had not time to attend.

It was densely, hideously crammed: the state of the atmosphere was such that Gilda stopped and gasped. Only by a strong effort, and determination *not* to give way, was she able, after a minute's pause, to enter.

There was no distinction of persons or of country—officers and men, Italians and Austrians, all crowded together. A few nurses, and a couple of sisters of mercy, hurrying to and fro—prayers, groans, and imprecations, all around.

"*Madre di Dio! non abbandonarmi!*" roared a stalwart son of Naples, who bore his slight gunshot wound less patiently than many did the loss of limbs. Gilda dressed and bound up his arm as well as she was able, not without a shudder: and his vociferous blessings almost alarmed her. The poor boy in the next bed,

who had sustained a mortal injury, and whom the surgeons had already examined, pronouncing his case hopeless, said faintly, as Mrs. Courteney moistened his lips with an orange,—

"Kind signora, do not waste your time on me. I am dying. They have told me so. There are others who may be saved. Go to them."

"Are you happy, my poor boy? Is there aught you wish? Have you seen a priest?"

He shook his head.

"I don't want one. We don't care for priests at home. I've done my duty, and I die for Italy. Oh, my poor mother! I should be quite happy if only she knew——"

"Give me her address. She shall learn how bravely you died."

And with this solace, she turned to the old Austrian beside him, whose arm had been shot away.

"A nice hospital you have here," groaned Radetzki's follower, with an oath: "a kennel of cursed Italian dogs, where one gets nothing

to eat or drink—and as to *discipline,* I should like the old marshal to see it!"

She bound up his wound, and went forward on her mission of mercy.

Gilda found her dexterity increase with her confidence and courage. She infused, moreover, some portion of her hopeful spirit into the heart of each sufferer she tended. The hour sped. Daylight was fast waning. The flickering rays of sunset no longer played upon the white-washed wall, and over the pillows of suffering men. The rapid twilight of the south was already enveloping the distant corners of the room, and there yet remained a row of beds at the upper end of it, which the ladies had not yet visited.

The confusion of nurses and assistants hurrying to and fro, and the fast-fading light rendered it difficult to distinguish the occupants of these until one was close to them. Gilda approached the first, and asked gently where his injury was. No answer. She touched the hand that lay passive on the coverlid. It was cold.

She started back. It was the first time she had come into actual contact with death; and she could not help shuddering. She snatched the lucerna a servant had just set down, and guided by its feeble light passed on to the next bed.

But this sufferer and the next one had been cared for. She passed on, leaving her mother some distance behind.

She had now reached the last bed on that side of the ward. As she came near, she raised her light, as she had done to the others—and was turning away, for lo! her help here, too, had been forestalled. A youth clad in gray leant over the pillow, busied in renewing a bandage on the brow of him who lay there.

Yes. She was turning away—but she stopped, rooted to the spot, her eyes fastened on the bed, a cold, sick horror creeping through her veins. She would have called out; she would have spoken his name: her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth. She would have drawn nearer: her limbs seemed turned to stone.

The sufferer was muttering in the unconscious delirium of fever; and impatiently snatched at the hand of his nurse each time it touched him. Gilda heard but one word moaned forth in all the agony of intense longing. It was her own name. The light fell from her hand and was extinguished on the floor.

The youth sprang up, and with the savage bound of a tiger, seized her arm, and thrust her back.

"What have you to do here? Who told you to come? You have followed him, have you? You will not give up the ground to me, then, even now you are married, heartless little jade? Have you forgotten the compact between us; or did your mother not tell you? Take care—if you cross my path!"

The youth crushed her wrist in his thin iron fingers, till a low cry broke from the terrified girl.

"Silence, fool!" said the other between his teeth, as he relaxed his grasp.

"But, Sara, Sara! in pity tell me. Is he

very ill? I knew nothing of his being here. I didn't indeed."

The disguised woman folded her arms and stood sentinel-wise before the bed. Even in the dim light, the triumphant glitter of her dark eyes was visible.

"He has a brain fever. Don't be deceived by his wild ravings after you. You like to hear them, eh, Mrs. Laurence Carr?—you come here to drink them in? *and your husband would like to hear them too!* But I warn you once again—take care! or it will be worse for you. You cannot have your fine English husband and your poor Italian lover too! You have made your choice, and *I* have taken the post that might have been yours. Trouble him and me no more, or I swear to God you shall repent it!"

"God forgive you, Sara! I only beseech you to tell me——"

The voice struck the ear of the delirous man. He started up in bed.

"Begone!" repeated Sara, beside herself with

passion. "You will kill him; and his blood be on your head, if he dies!"

The wretched Gilda turned, and walked feebly to the centre of the room, where her mother was occupied. Scarcely knowing what she was about, she touched her on the arm, murmuring,—

"Let us go. I am ill. I can stay no longer."

The growing darkness and confusion of noise had effectually prevented Mrs. Courteney's seeing or hearing anything of the scene so rapidly enacted at the farther end of the ward.

As soon as they were in the open air, Gilda laid her hand upon her mother's arm.

"Mother, I have seen him!"

It was all she said, and Mrs. Courteney needed no more. She had felt a dim dread of this all along, as a possibility which it behoved her to avert, if she could. It was not to be averted; and what she dreaded had come to pass.

"Is he very ill, my child?" she asked, at last. "If so, I will go back to him so soon as——"

"No! mother——Sara."

As she gasped out that name, Mrs. Courteney clasped her hands, and murmured,—

"Good God! what horrible fatality is this? That woman——here!——my poor child, you know not what you have done! that woman's enmity——"

"Has opened my eyes to the truth at last, mother," said Gilda in a very low voice. "I see it all now. But oh! is there nothing to be done?—about him, I mean. Must we leave him, then, to her care? Knowing him, loving him as we have done, mother—it seems so hard to abandon him; so cruel and unnatural."

"It must be so, Gilda," said Mrs. Courteney, hastily; "we know he is well tended and cared for; and even *I* dare not return and face that woman now. The consequences to you, my child, might be very miserable. Pray God to avert them, and soften that wretched girl's heart! If, as I suppose, from their being here together, he loves her——"

"*He does not.*" Gilda's breathing came short and thick, and she hurried her pace, but the

words would out. "She tried to deceive me. I was not to be deceived. I *heard* him, I *saw* him. Of course it is all one to me now, mother; but I *know* he doesn't love her."

Mrs. Courteney said no more; she was wisely afraid of pressing the point. The work of months had been destroyed in a moment, and that secret divulged which she had hoped, for her child's happiness, Gilda might never know. Yet she trusted her firmly—implicitly. The very truth and daring with which she had spoken those words, testified to the young wife's pure crystal nature.

The two ladies, in their agitation and excitement, had reached Casa Santi before they remembered that Carr was to have called for them. It was too late, and they were too tired to think of retracing their steps. The marchesa was with him: he would easily learn that they had left the hospital.

CHAPTER IV.

THE two ladies were summoned to supper half an hour later. The marchesa had returned. Besides Madame Santi and the other two officers, there was also the Piedmontese cavalry captain, who was introduced as Madame Santi's *nephew*. Carr's place was vacant.

Gilda felt wretched: she wished her husband would appear. Her pale face and swollen eyes could not fail to attract attention.

"Is this your English beauty?" muttered Piedmont, under its long tawny moustache, to the dark-eyed Italian lady beside him. "Well, there is no accounting for tastes! *Elle se pose en martyr*, I see; and her virtues, I daresay, are great; but——"

"Hold your tongue, *cugino mio*. You will

discuss this pasty of ortolans better than you can a woman's virtues. You know nothing about them."

"I know yours, cara."

"The list is small enough," replied the lady, laughing; "and as to this little *Inglese*, she is too good for such as you. Signora," she cried, elevating her voice, "what have you done with your handsome husband? He left me some time ago to return to you. Did you not wait for him?"

He appeared at that same moment; and with a polite salutation to the lady of the house, seated himself at the opposite side of the table to his wife, without looking towards her. Her countenance brightened as he entered, and she tried to catch his eye; but he seemed resolved not to look that way. To any one unacquainted with the variations of his countenance, he was much as usual—polished, agreeable, well-bred. But Gilda and her mother had learnt to watch every shade of that most impressionable character as it rose to the surface. They knew at once that he was not quite pleased.

"I was just asking where you were," said the marchesa. "Here is your poor little wife, who has been looking most disconsolate."

"Ladies manage to look so at a very short notice, I believe," said Carr, with what was meant for the perfection of quiet sarcasm.

"Did I not tell you," whispered Piedmont, "that she was enacting the martyr?"

"I have been pacing the street in front of the hospital for the last hour," continued the injured Carr, still carefully avoiding his wife's eye.

"Gilda was not well, and obliged to come home," said her mother.

He turned quickly round, his countenance undergoing the most instantaneous change. There was no lack of love underlying that morbid, sensitive folly. He gazed at her now with the most intense inquiring anxiety. She returned the look, with a little nod and smile of reassurance; and amid vociferous Italian jokes, boastful wagers as to when the *maledetti Tedeschi* should be driven across the Alps, and such like, the supper slowly progressed.

How those Italians did eat! As to Piedmont, his catholic interior seemed capable of embracing all things in its astounding fervour. Nor could a family resemblance in this respect—if in no other—be said to be wanting between the two Italian ladies and their military relative. It was plain Madame Santi thought but poorly of her English guests from the meagre repast they made. She whispered to her neighbour, "*Ho inteso che gli Inglese non mangiono altro che il carne crudo coll' acqua-vita,*" a proposition the truth of which the officer next her was not prepared to dispute.

But the supper was not to conclude without further agitation to Gilda. The marchesa, in the amiable endeavour to bring her English friends into the fold of general conversation, began questioning Mrs. Courteney relative to the hospital. Suddenly, clapping her hand to her brow, she cried,—

"*Ma, Dio mio!* What was I thinking of not to tell you that an old friend of yours, poor Guido Lamberti, was lying there, ill of brain-

fever? I only heard it an hour ago—it is true—and they told me the danger was over, and he was well cared for—*very well cared for*—otherwise I should have gone to look after him myself. Did you see him?"

"I did not." Mrs. Courteney spoke plainly and deliberately; she knew the peril of anything short of the direct truth, boldly spoken in such cases. "I did not; but my daughter did. He *was* well cared for, and our services were not required."

The marchesa smiled, and said no more. Gilda was annoyed to feel the blood rush up into her face, and then as suddenly desert it. She had been taught by her mother to hate all concealments. Painful as it must be to allude to the subject, she fully meant to tell her husband of that meeting, and was only waiting till they were alone to do so; not of the insults she had received at Sara's hand—it could do no good to repeat *those*; and Gilda shrank from alluding to the equivocal position the Creole had appeared to accept, if not to court. But of Guido him-

self, Gilda would speak openly; she felt it to be unfortunate, however, knowing her husband's peculiar temperament, that the fact should transpire thus in public. She looked at her husband, and found, as she half anticipated, that his countenance had fallen many degrees below zero. He helped himself largely to salad, though he had announced a moment before that he had no appetite, and devoured it with a voracity which rivalled the Italians. He did not look up from his plate; no, his attention was apparently concentrated upon the beet-root and garlic dripping with oil; but there was a spot on his brow which could not deceive the young wife. By the time supper was over he had half satisfied himself that she was cognizant of Guido Lamberti's being in the hospital, and that this was the secret cause which had brought her to Peschiera.

The repast terminated with a dish of *marrons glacés*, transfixed on tooth-picks; after which the men with a slight bow towards Madame Santi, lit their cigars, and the marchesa joined them with a cigaretto. The English ladies soon after-

wards rose, and, pleading fatigue, withdrew to their own rooms. Mrs. Courteney, however, in wishing the marchesa good-night, asked for the favour of a few moments' conversation with her.

As soon as she found herself alone with the Italian lady, she said,—

"I will tell you as briefly as I can what I have to say. It is about Count Lamberti. I am troubled, uneasy about him; I have known him since he was a boy, and have the warmest, tenderest regard for him. I would gladly go and nurse him—were it not that another woman is there already. Nor is this all. There are circumstances which render it imperative that this woman and I should not meet: therefore——"

"You know her, then?" exclaimed the other in astonishment. "She has been exciting the curiosity of the whole camp; she has taken part in nearly every battle, and preserved her disguise so well that her sex was not discovered for a long time. It was poor Razzi's rage and jealousy that betrayed her at last. It seems

that she had been leading him on with *hopes*, which she never meant to fulfil, and his ungovernable indignation burst openly forth, when he found that it was Guido Lamberti all the time with whom she was in love. While poor Razzi remains at Goïto, she followed Guido here, and since he fell ill, she has thrown off all concealment, and nursed him so devotedly, that—that—in short there is no doubt whatever of the position in which they stand towards each other."

"Pardon me. I have very grave doubts whether it be more than the insane passion of an unprincipled girl for a man who is utterly indifferent to her. So long as he is unconscious of her presence, she will devote herself to him day and night; but if she should find that this devotion is unavailing, it will of course cease, even if no worse happen. I know you feel an interest in Guido Lamberti. Promise me that you will not leave him entirely at the mercy of this woman. You will keep a watchful eye over him, will you not?"

"Depend on it I will," and the marchesa grasped her new acquaintance warmly by the hand. "We cannot spare our Guido; we have too few like him, alas! But I hope he will be a *little* grateful to her, eh? *Poverina!* It is hard upon us women, signora, when we sacrifice everything, and get nothing in return."

With this the ladies separated. Meantime a scene of a different nature was being enacted in the adjoining room.

"My dear Gilda, I make no complaint. I think it very natural that you should wish to go and see your old friend, when you knew he was ill in hospital, but——"

"But I did *not* know it, Laurence, I repeat. It was by the purest accident I found him."

"Appearances, you will admit, were strangely in favour of such a supposition; your eagerness to get to Peschiera, your declining my escort to the hospital, and your returning here without me. However, I am perfectly ready to believe it *was* an accident, only I beg you not to think that I am a jealous fool, and that had it been

otherwise—had you, in short, learnt that Lamberti was ill, I would willingly have allowed you to go and see him. My confidence in you is too great——"

"That is right, dearest Laurence. Whatever I may do, however foolish I may be—and women, you know, dear, are not *always* wise—be sure that I am true, that I would not deceive you for the world. I gave you, Laurence Carr,"—here she looked down and her voice faltered,—"the best proof of this when you asked me to marry you. I showed you my whole heart—down to the very bottom."

She looked up now, and fixing her clear gray eyes upon his face, added, after a pause, "You must never doubt me after that."

And he took her to his heart, and kissed her in rapturous fondness, and swore that he never would.

After all, he *was* a jealous fool, and she was an angel,—but it was out of the excess of his love that he had sinned.

So the ground was weeded of that noxious plant,

and the sun shone in upon pleasant garden-places. And yet it may be doubted whether a grain of the baneful seed had not fallen, unperceived and far out of sight, into the womb of that productive soil.

CHAPTER V.

The strong man, whose life had seemed so specially guarded through the perils of battle, had been struck down at last, by the unerring hand of Nature. Long-continued excitement telling alike on mind and body—both had suddenly given way, and a brain fever of the most alarming complexion was the result.

The violence of the disorder was now abated: the fierceness of delirious raving had been followed by a state of exhaustion, with fitful lapses into feverish unconsciousness. To one of these Gilda Carr had been witness. The constant repetition of her name, the broken and confused images of things associated with her, still gave evidence at such moments that the darkened mind had not yet resumed its empire, though it was

struggling towards the light. Like Samson, however, there was strength even in its blindness. The crushing sarcasms, the bitter reproaches, aimed now at himself, now at others, which ran throughout his wildest ravings, made the Dalilah beside him wince and grow pale. But hers was a torment the false Philistine never knew. The imagination of the most refined cruelty never invented a torture so maddening to a turbulent, passionate nature as this: sitting day by day beside the *one* object of every thought, every hope, present and future, and listening to the vehement adjurations, the tender pleadings, the unconscious cries, of the agonized heart, all—all for another!

She sat there, with her elbows on her knees, hour after hour, gnashing her teeth as the hated name rose to his lips, and pressing the small, hard white knuckles on which her chin rested, till the sharp nails entered the flesh. She rose to wipe the damp of fever from his brow, to administer the draught, or squeeze the pomegranate on his lips, and then she resumed her seat. Hour after hour; night succeeding to day; snatching brief intervals

of rest, without undressing, and then, vigilant as ever, at her post again. Her face was somewhat white and worn; the short-cut black hair hung dank around it: those wondrous midnight eyes were surrounded by the ashy lines that mark an inward consuming fire. Yet the woman was, perhaps, even more striking thus than she had ever appeared before. Her singularly graceful figure, and beautifully modelled feet and ancles, were seen to advantage in the boy's loose gray dress. Her slender throat rising from the folded shirt-collar, and small shell-like ear, showed prominently under the short loose locks. Add to this, the mystery that surrounded her, the somewhat scornful dignity of her manners, the coolness, and courage, and dexterity she had displayed, and it will be readily understood that not a few hot-blooded young Italians would have risked a brain-fever to be regarded and tended as Guido now was.

She was playing a desperate game. Would she win or lose? With regard to her relations with Razzi I shall say nothing. It is not my business

to inquire how far the reproaches of that fatuitous youth were justified, or what measure of faith she had broken towards him. So much seems certain: she had used him as a shield, or blind, and now she had cast him aside. With regard to that other, the question was narrowed to this: Would gratitude for her unwearying devotion, would admiration for her heroic efforts in the great national cause, triumph finally over that puerile passion which had wrought such havoc in his life? She had heard of men rising from the brink of the grave, where, in truth, he had lain for some days, in whose thoughts, sympathies, and affections an entire revolution had been wrought. Her whole life—the life of the heart, that is—was bound up in this venture. Against the testimony of her ears, through all those ravings, she dared to believe that Guido would rise an altered man.

He had lain for many hours after that convulsive effort by which he started erect in bed, beholding the spectre of his disordered brain palpably before him, in a deep, dreamless sleep. The doctor had been his round, and pronounced

favourably on him: the first and second watch were passed. No rest for Sara to-night! her nerves were strung to that fine pitch, when all idea of sleep is utterly discarded. The tempest which had raged in her soul at confronting her hated rival was hardly yet assuaged; the suggestions of a malignant vengeance were only stifled down, to bide their own bad time. For she awaited his waking; she knew he would awake to consciousness—to the consciousness of *her* presence; and in the feverish balance of hopes and fears she sat there watching.

As the golden gray of the summer dawn broke, he heaved a deep sigh and opened his eyes. They opened upon Sara—a strange, wondering look—and then wandered along the crowded pallets of the whitewashed ward. Though unconscious and perplexed as to where he lay, it was evident the fever had left him. The mind was clear, and able to admit, and reason upon, every outward impression. He lifted his hand to his head as though recalling and arranging a long-scattered train of thought; then, after a few minutes' in-

terval, he raised himself a little on his elbow and regarded Sara steadily and in silence.

"How long have I been here?" he said, in a low but perfectly clear voice.

"This is the eighth day."

"I have been very ill, then?"

"You have."

"And is it you—*you* who have watched by me all this time? I thought—I dreamt—that——"

"That an angel of light was beside you; and you find an angel of darkness?" Her lip quivered, and she continued, grimly—"Yes, Guido Lamberti, it is *I* who have watched beside you all this time. You cannot deprive me of the satisfaction of having *twice* saved your life."

He sank back upon the pillow, and turned away his head with a weary sigh.

"It is a very worthless one: of little value to anybody now."

"You know that what you say is false!" she replied in a tremulous, vehement voice. "Your life *is* of value—of inestimable value to one,

Lamberti; else she had not dragged you out of the very jaws of death, at her own peril."

"I am not ungrateful; believe me, I am not ungrateful, Sara. I am only sorry that you have devoted your days and nights to rescuing such a life as mine. There are others better worth the care, that must have perished for want of it meantime."

"How *many* days and nights I have devoted to you," said Sara, bitterly; "plotted, struggled, wept for you, Lamberti, you will never know. But you *do* know that I ask for nothing else than to devote all the days and nights of my whole life to you," she continued, impetuously. "I am no weak, puling girl: I am a woman; strong in passion—stronger in energy and resolution. Has my life lately proved this to you? Has it proved that I am not wholly unworthy of you, and the cause for which you fight? I have cast my lot in with the patriots of Italy. My voice has roused, my arm—woman as I am—has helped; my care has nursed them in sickness. And why? Is it for the sake of Italy? I care no more

for Italy, except through you, than I do for Austria."

She was down on her knees by his bed now; and close to the pale emaciated hand that lay outside the coverlid her burning lips poured forth the long-pent stream of passion.

"I have been ambitious, Guido. All my ambition I sacrifice to you; to belong to a poor man; to fight and struggle, and work for him. I have never known what *good* was: all my life has been disfigured with the early knowledge of sin; *you* awake in me the consciousness of better things, and make me believe in the possibility of an altered—a redeemed life. You fill a void in my being, which nothing else *can* fill. And thus altered—thus purified, I know that my life would fill a void in yours; that I could in reality be a help meet for you, Guido, which—which that weak girl——"

"Sara! let me implore you not to continue thus! God knows I am sensible of all I owe you! You have laid me under a heavy debt of gratitude, and it is impossible I can repay your

self-sacrifices in any other way than in bare words. The heart, Sara, is not there. In its place is a stone; no more capable of beating for another human being, as it once did, than if it were already lying at rest for ever under the sod. Better it were so! Italy can spare me; her independence is won. My poor mother would soon have joined me; and she is the only creature left me to care for on earth."

"It is false!" exclaimed Sara, violently, starting to her feet. "You care for *her* still—for another man's wife; for the miserable creature whose name has been on your lips all through your delirium!"

He trembled violently; the weak state he was in rendering his agitation quite uncontrollable.

"What did I say?" he murmured at last. "Did any one hear me? Was any one by?"

In the instant which intervened before she replied, she balanced the probable advantages of truth and falsehood, and decided promptly in favour of the latter.

"No: the world is still ignorant of the fatal secret of your heart, Count Lamberti. It has

not conceived it possible that you remain cold, untouched by the devotion of a woman who has risked her life and sacrificed her reputation for you. The true motive of my presence here is no secret. No one is innocent enough," she continued, with a sneer, "to imagine it is from pure philanthropy, or Platonic friendship, that I have sacrificed that which is of most value to a woman in this world. I have thrust myself voluntarily out of the pale of society, *and I have my reward!*"

The rare combination of a violent nature with the most consummate art, made it difficult at times to say how far Sara was carried away by the impetus of her really strong feelings, or how far she merely simulated to be so. In the present instance the proud sensitive voice, with its touch of reproachful scorn, might be a management of natural resources—a keeping of the feelings *well in hand*, so to speak, which was calculated with the most artistic knowledge of effect. But surely there was something also real and deep.

An expression of sharp pain crossed the young

man's brow, and he flushed up to the very temples ere he replied slowly—

"Pardon me: if your name has been coupled with anyone's, it is rather with Giuglio Razzi's. I know he loves you. I believed, as I suppose others did, that it was for his sake you——"

"*His* sake!" she broke into a scornful laugh. "That idiot Razzi's? Am I a woman likely to be captivated by a pair of sleek moustaches? I made use of him, as I would have done of any other fool; and he deluded himself in the belief I should one day marry him. In my most abject moments I never contemplated the possibility of it, though a friendless woman—an *adventuress*—is often driven to such a deed for the shelter of a respectable name. God knows to what I may *not* be driven," she added with a burst of natural feeling, "when the only honest passion on which I anchored is cut away!"

"You have deceived an honest man, which no honest passion should induce a woman to do," he replied coldly. "I fear you are ambitious; that you will seek higher game than poor Razzi, and

fling it away when snared like him, if it is to serve your own ends. Listen to me. As you hope for peace here and hereafter, neither seek nor accept the love you cannot *return*. You have great gifts to attract men, great powers to influence them for good or evil. Beware how you exercise these." He paused for a moment; then went on with remarkable distinctness, though his voice had waxed very weak: "As for myself, I will not let you deceive yourself, even though you think me cruel or ungrateful. My heart cannot warm to you or any other woman again. Its fire is burnt out—dead. Do not think to rekindle it. Our natures are very widely different, Sara. Our union could never be blest. You will wake up from this infatuation: but let me be your *friend*. Think of me as such, and I will try and prove so in reality. You fancy I can exercise a beneficial influence on you? Let me do so in that character, if I can. You are steering in dangerous courses. Let me prove that I am not unmindful of your generous devotion by endeavouring to guide and save you!"

A torrent of passionate tears burst from the unhappy woman, and she sank down by the bed again, hiding her face in her quivering hands. Then, starting up, she dashed away the scalding drops, and in a tremulous voice that seethed out from the raging fire within, she said,—

"*I will follow you, Guido Lamberti, till I die!* Though I may seem to forget the one object of my life—mark me—I never shall! never forget nor turn away from it. I may fall lower and lower—the little good left in me may die out quite, but in this I tell you there will be no change. Your offer of a cold friendship I reject; your counsel I deride; but you do not know me yet. No! You shall find there was sterner stuff here than you thought for, before we both die. There is no 'waking up' for me to any other knowledge of my own heart than as it now is. I see myself with hideous distinctness—all the deformity ungraced by anything save *love:* and that love you cast back upon me—to corrode and eat out my very vitals. Would to God it would turn to hatred! but towards *you* it never will! Twice I have saved

your life—it is a bitter satisfaction—and I may yet live to do so again. I shall watch you at a distance, or at least unseen; but I shall never lose sight of you; and in any trying juncture of your life, we shall again meet. This shall be the vengeance of the woman you despised, Guido Lamberti!"

He was too weak to utter; and without another word she turned aside and hurried from the ward.

"Oh," she muttered to herself, as she rushed into the street, and tearing open her collar, bared her stifling bosom to the pure morning air—"oh! but there is another vengeance, less mild but no less sweet! He worships her still! and she would come and nurse him, and drink in the flattery of his ravings, would she? The compact between us is broken!"

CHAPTER VI.

The Villa Fossombroni stood on a hill over against the pleasant Lake of Garda. It might be a mile to the water's edge—more or less—through the intervening vineyards, the groves of mulberry and lemon; but an arrow, shot from the terrace, would probably reach the same point in half the distance. Upon the other side the stony, dusty road crawled up the back of the hill, describing many a tortuous bend which, by a curious faculty, while they doubled the length of the ascent, seemed in nowise to diminish its steepness. This road, which was little better than a watercourse in winter, only led to the villa and its *fattoria*. It was never mended. Occasionally a great stone was brought to fill some hole, which threatened to upset the

vine-dresser's cart: but the noble owner of the villa was too poor or too careless about it, to think of mending his own road. The few weeks of the Villeggiatura spent here was all he saw of his property during the year; and probably even then he never traversed this road from the day his rickety *vetturino* toiled up the weary ascent to the day when he stepped into that same conveyance again on his way back to Milan. He sat, no doubt, with hermetically sealed windows during the greater part of the glaring summer day, playing at dominoes with a friend and smoking his cigar, very much as he might have done in his *café* at Milan; and, in the evening, instead of the *Scala* or the *Circolo*, there was the sail upon the lake, or a languid stroll through the vineyard. Could the state of the road be of material importance to him?

Nor were the villa and its dependencies much better cared for than the road. Nothing could be less like the generally conceived idea of an Italian villa. A square pink building, pierced at irregular intervals with eyelet-holes of windows,

and having a *loggia* or covered terrace running round two sides of it. Shade there was none; garden there was none. The dusty vines came up quite close to the house on three sides: on the fourth there was a small plot of sunburnt grass, with a few oleanders and oranges in square green boxes, and one very old olive. This tree,—the only one of any size for half a mile round,—was probably the last remaining of a grove that had been cut down to make room for the vines and dwarfed mulberries. It grew so close to the house that the shadow of its fantastically twisted limbs, laden with silvery-green fringes, chequered in tremulous blue mosaic the white pavement of the loggia. As a companion to this solitary and venerable relic of a past day, one desolate peacock, with an habitual air of moulting about his rusty plumage, kept sentinel on the terrace, as the walk on this side of the house was called. He was of a speculative turn of mind, this grim old retainer of the Fossombroni. Standing on one leg, his head inclined on the same side, with a curious, puzzled look, he stood

on the window-sills and peered at the occupants of the rooms within, maundering, no doubt, after the manner of old decayed servants, on the changes he had witnessed in his time.

Beyond this terrace, the vineyards, and lemon-gardens, and fields of maize or buck-wheat, bordered with rows of thick-leaved pollard mulberries, stretched away over undulating slopes down to the water's edge. The lake, ever varying, ever beautiful, at dawn or eve, in storm or shine, whether taking the folded hills like a mother to its bosom, or thrusting them back in the hot fight of noon with its argent shield, undimmed by dint or shadow—the lake, backed by a distant amphitheatre of Alps, was the one object of attraction to the Villa Fossombroni. Its *fattoria*—the most important building on such a property as this in Italy—was a separate and substantial house, in far better order in all respects than the villa itself. Not only was the wine made here, the flax dried, the lemons and laurel-berries gathered in, but one, the largest and airiest room, was entirely devoted to the rearing

of silk-worms, the culture of which is now the most lucrative branch of Lombard industry. Surrounding the *fattoria* was a small farmyard. The community of pigs and fowls, though a poor one, dwelt together in a lively contentment, which contrasted strongly with the dignified but depressed deportment of that solitary peacock who formed the entire live stock of the villa. Nor was the difference of the two interiors less strongly marked—the active, industrial life of the factor's dwelling, with the silence and stagnation of that more pretentious one, where no life was. The rooms were large and lofty, and there were plenty of them. This was all that could be said. They were utterly bare of furniture—as *we* understand that term—curtainless, carpetless, comfortless throughout. There was a few rickety chairs and tables, beds and commodes, with one very hard settee in the saloon—so hard, cold, and slippery, indeed, that it was like getting upon a frozen sea. On the other hand some fine Majolica plates, a small bronze fountain by John of Bologna, and a folding screen covered

with extraordinarily coarse caricatures belonging to a day which is happily past, were the incongruous adornment of the aforesaid saloon. I must not forget a wiry old piano, and a bagatelle board—this last novelty being the sole addition made by the present proprietor to his country residence.

It was late on a rainy afternoon when Carr walked up the hill I have described, alongside the *vetturino* in which the two ladies were seated. Heavy clouds drowned the distant landscape, as they do even in Italy at times, particularly in mountainous districts. There could hardly have been a less favourable moment for the "first impression" of Carr's summer residence. Robbed of its one attraction, the glorious panorama before it, nothing, certainly, could well look more cheerless and uninviting than the villa did. The Englishman's philosophy, which had been oozing out of him for the last half-hour, was wholly exhausted when he crossed the threshold, and entering the saloon, gazed ruefully round him.

"Impossible to remain here! We should die

of it in a week. Confound the fellow's lying impudence!—talking of this barrack as '*un vero paradiso*.' Did you ever see such an abomination of desolation?".

"Oh, dear, yes, Laurence," said his wife, cheerfully. "I have seen many much worse, which, with a little arrangement, and by dint of living in, have grown to look very different. I don't think when the sun shines this will really be at all ugly—large cool rooms: and see there! under that *loggia*, I am sure one has a charming view."

"Oh, charming! vines diversified by mulberries; that was all I saw on the road up."

"Well, dear, it's a paradise in one thing, at all events," said his wife cheerfully again; "there's no *forbidden* fruit."

But he wouldn't laugh.

"I wonder what people in England would think of my sanity in coming to this wretched hole to pass the summer? As to my mother——"

He seldom or never made an allusion to her; and the fact that he did so now indicated that he was unusually out of sorts. He turned

abruptly away without concluding his sentence, and walked drearily through the remaining apartments, with his hands thrust deep into his paletot pockets.

Gilda and her mother, meantime, busied themselves, as women only do under such circumstances, in unpacking and assisting in the arrangement of their bedrooms, and instructing the two women whom the fattore had engaged to do the housework in the mysteries of making a bed in the English fashion. Furthermore—Giuseppe being occupied in the primary duty of unpacking his master's shirts, and endeavouring to cram them into drawers which manifestly never could contain them—Gilda was shortly afterwards to be seen in the kitchen, teaching the two good-humoured, laughing peasant-women how to prepare the tea-service. One of them had carefully poured all the boiling water into the slop-basin, into which she had apparently some vague intention of infusing the leaves. An ewer full of milk had undergone as well the unnecessary preparation of boiling; but this was easily remedied from

the farm hard by. Triumphing, in short, over all her difficulties, Gilda at last saw her tea-table properly laid out and served; and when Carr entered the room a few minutes later, the snowy cloth and hissing kettle under the lamp-light, with chairs drawn round it, had an air of comfort which surprised him. His good humour, which was never ruffled for very long, was now completely restored; and though not much more disposed to look hopefully at the aspect of things, he was more disposed to laugh at it.

"There is no chance of one's being overwhelmed with society here, certainly, unless it be the Austrians down yonder; but they apparently have already paid this villa a visit—and sacked it. They'll hardly find it worth their while to come again, so we shall not even have *that* little excitement. What a profoundly dismal abode! though you have managed to make this room look *almost* comfortable, Gilda. I suppose with one's books and paintings one will pull through, somehow or other; but really when you and I have been here fifty days, I think we shall

deserve the flitch of bacon, much more than by living fifty years among the pomps and vanities of a wicked world."

"You forget that the wicked world is coming to us before many of the fifty days have elapsed. The marchesa is coming to her aunt's, whose villa she says you see upon the lake from this."

"I don't envy her the view she has in return, then." He laughed; then added more gravely, "I do not know that the marchesa's is the society I should wish you to see too much of, Gilda. She is a pleasant, amusing, generous-hearted creature; but a woman who, from whatever circumstances, has lost all self-respect, is never a very desirable companion,—don't you agree with me, Mrs. Courteney? Good heavens! you look very pale. Are you ill? The journey has been to much for you."

"No; it is nothing; it is past. I know too little of Madame Onofrio to judge her. I suppose you are right. But you would make a distinction, Laurence, would you not, between a present and a past life? If—if she were repentant you would

not think her *past* contaminating for *ever and ever*, would you?"

"Well, no; not exactly: I'm not so strait-laced as all that. Still I think one's wife may be just as well without too intimate association with those sort of ladies. If one's not very particular," he continued, didactically, "there is no knowing when one will stop. Not that this has anything to do with the marchesa, who is no Magdalene, but a woman with strong feelings, who has been driven by an unhappy marriage into a groove where old age will suddenly overtake her; and then she will be reconciled with the Church, and take to making her salvation."

"You have no faith, then, in the repentance of middle age?" said Mrs. Courteney, sorrowfully.

"God forbid that I should judge any one! But those who only repent when the capacity or opportunity of sinning fails them haven't much merit, I should think."

"I didn't think it was a question of merit either way," said Gilda, quietly; "but none of

the labourers were excluded, Laurence, even at the eleventh hour, remember."

"I always considered those who had borne the burden and heat of the day very unfairly treated, nevertheless. If there is to be no distinction between a pure life and a tardy repentance——"

His wife had risen and come round to where he was sitting. As she leant over and kissed his forehead, she whispered,—

"Don't say anything more. I think it distresses mamma,—perhaps on account of papa,—I don't know."

And so Carr abruptly changed the conversation, and the marchesa's name was not mentioned again that evening.

CHAPTER VII.

"Well! By Jove! that is a stunning view, I must confess! Come here, Gilda, and look out. Look at that curtain of clouds slowly drifting off those distant mountains. And how wonderfully fresh and brilliant everything is after yesterday's rain! The lights and shadows on the waters, clear and crisp as if they'd been dashed in by Harding!"

"What a compliment to nature!" laughed Gilda.

"I long to try my hand at it. The white sails of that feluca yonder, like wings rippling the water: and the early blue mists lying in the hollows out there, where the sun has not yet reached. How capitally it would paint! Even that foreground, which I thought so monotonous.

last night, has a great deal of character. The tangled lemon-grove, and pergola of vines, with the wild Indian corn and fig-tree struggling up here and there: something might be made of it. I shall paint you, Gilda, sitting upon that low wall, and the peacock beside you, just for a bit of colour."

"Thank you; I am too much flattered. And now, perhaps, you will allow me to finish dressing."

She ran away; while he still leant out in his dressing-gown, painting imaginary pictures, and thinking that after all the Villa Fossombroni was not half such a bad place as he had fancied. After breakfast Gilda exercised her ingenuity in trying to render the saloon a little more comfortable. She routed out two large pieces of faded tapestry from a lumber-room, where they were rolled up, and spread them in the centre of the floor. She disturbed the symmetrical arrangement of chair and table, and disposed them according to her own ideas. She plucked a few tendrils of vine to furnish the large Majolica jars; she improvised some muslin blinds for the windows;

and finally, by a judicious disorder of books and work, she showed herself a mistress in the womanly art of making a cheerless room assume something of a home-aspect.

Carr's pleased surprise when he entered the room more than repaid his wife.

"Well," he said; "I shall not in future refuse to believe the stories of Indian magicians making pineapples and fruit-trees grow up out of the bare boards. How on earth have you managed to turn the barrack I saw last night into a habitable room?"

"Living in Italy teaches one all sorts of shifts and contrivances in this way," she said, smiling. "It also teaches one to make the best of whatever one has, and not to be discouraged by first impressions — which *some* people I know are apt to be."

"I was not discouraged by the first impression I received some eight months ago, during a certain vesper service at San Petronio, Mrs. Impertinence; and I rather think I *do* make the best of what I have got."

"Are you sure of that?"

Thus playfully skirmishing, as he prepared his palette and easel, while his wife flitted to and fro upon household cares intent, Carr found the morning glide rapidly by. His mercurial spirit rose with the sunshine, as rapidly as it had been depressed with the petty annoyances of the previous night. Neither care nor suspicion were at hand to cast their baneful shadows on his path. His income and expenditure would soon recover their proper balance in a few months quietly spent here. Meantime he would really work hard at his painting, which, from one cause or another, he had not yet done since he came to Italy.

Shall it be held fair and honourable to try and penetrate the young wife's feelings that same morning, which was destined to be the boundary between two epochs of her married life? There can scarcely be a doubt that any illusion which had surrounded Carr was by this time dispelled. His weaknesses were not those of a vigorous or large mind; his very brilliancy was of that secondary

water which becomes somewhat dim in the every-day fire-light of home. His love suffered no diminution, but it was likely to be of a jealous, perhaps even tyrannical, nature. And yet, paradoxical as it may seem, her feeling for her husband was far truer and stronger than it had been when she married. That step once taken, she shut her eyes resolutely to the past; and turned her thoughts fixedly upon the future she had accepted. She instinctively felt the danger of neglecting such a course; and under that quiet demeanour was a strength of purpose which, perhaps, even her own mother did not fully recognize. A strength, differing from Sara Gisborne's in this, that it was neither passionate nor spasmodic, capable of no heroic colour, and only apparent, indeed, on close inspection, and at certain times; so that not even those who lived with her—least of all her husband—were aware of this hidden force. If she had not succeeded in rooting up, she had at least cut down *to* the very roots, the strong broad-leafed passion of her girlhood. Beside it—not in its place—had grown up a slender

sapling, whose branches as yet, indeed, afforded little shade, but round which she clung and twined herself, resolved to find there both shadow and support. This feeling was, no doubt, fostered by the nature of Carr's love for her. Exacting as was the form in which this was sometimes shown, she found herself to be of hourly importance to his happiness; and this, in any woman's eyes, covers a multitude of sins. He was no hero: but he had some generous qualities, and many foibles. She saw how early education had choked the former, and developed the latter. She felt with a woman's instinct the necessity of studying to counterbalance this pernicious influence. As Lady Carrlyon, without undue exaggeration, might have passed for the evil spirit of his youth, so here was his good angel, struggling to regain possession of the man. And in this struggle the gentle, tender-hearted girl grew day by day into the true wife, consecrating all her thoughts unto her husband. He did not come between her and that impossible dream of the past, which was put out of sight—and for ever; for that belonged to

an ideal world, and this was the world of fact in which she was living. She had grown into a tacit acceptance of the belief that such dreams are never realized; that they only gild the morning of girlhood, and melt away into the sober realities of the afternoon.

She had attained to this frame of mind, after six months of married life, when she found Guido Lamberti in the hospital at Peschiera. The night that followed that meeting was a miserable one. Ever present to her mind was the image of the fevered man, calling upon her again and again in his ravings. In the knowledge thus gained she had at first (alas! for the strength of all mere human effort) felt an irrepressible joy. He loved her, then! he had always loved her! But the natural reaction came; she started back horror-stricken to find that the past was not as completely effaced from her heart as she had believed. Carr's jealous suspicions aggravated her misery; yet they were, perhaps, fortunately timed in rousing her to the very present work her hands had to do. She passed a miserable night, but she rose calmer

and stronger from the conflict. She looked very pale and tired during the journey, which elicited from Carr the remark that hospital work would evidently never agree with her. He was not otherwise than kind in his manner; but his wife's appearance seemed to annoy, and perhaps even more than the weather contributed to depress him. In proportion as his spirits fell, however, she exerted herself to rouse and cheer her husband: we have seen to what effect. If it be asked, after this, whether she was happy, I can only beg the reader to decide the question for himself out of his own consciousness, and according to his belief in the amount of contentment that attends such efforts as hers.

The post came in the afternoon. They were taking their coffee in the loggia, when the bag was brought to Carr, and he tore open the single letter it contained.

"Confound it!" he exclaimed. "My mother's coming here!"

"Lady Carrlyon?" said both ladies in a breath.

"Yes!" replied the son, with an expression of

countenance not flattering to her ladyship. "She's at Baden with my father, who has been ordered there, and so she thinks it a pity not to take advantage of being so near me to cross the Alps, she says. Heaven knows what she is to do here! she'll be bored to death. I would stop her if I could, but it's too late, she is on her road. Dated the second, I see, and this is the eighth. These confounded posts have been delayed, I suppose, from the state of things here."

"When do you think she can arrive?" asked Mrs. Courteney.

Carr referred to his letter.

"She *expects* to be at Como to-morrow, and will write to me from there; but says there is no use in my going to meet her, as she is uncertain about her route, which will depend on the state of the country. She is immensely plucky, you know, and not turned aside by a trifle; so having made up her mind to come — come she will. Nevertheless, she hasn't much idea of roughing it; she'll never stand the life here: and then the worst of it is, she is such a tremendous

Austrian! I shall have no peace on account of my Italian sympathies, which *you* have infected me with, Gilda. The best, the *only* good thing about her coming is" (he looked with a satisfied smile towards his wife) "that it shows, I think, she wants to know you, to greet my wife, *meglio tardi che mai*, as a daughter."

Gilda did not appear as much exhilarated by this view of the case as might have been desired. She had always regarded the idea of her mother-in-law with profound awe; she could hardly tell why, unless from Carr's cautious silence hitherto on the subject. The intimation of Lady Carrlyon's soon becoming an inmate of the villa fell on her like a dead-weight; it was more than the prospect of present discomfort or annoyance; it was a presentiment of future evils, vague and undefined. As to Mrs. Courteney, it was easy to see that some acute trouble weighed upon her, of which she struggled to unburden herself in words. At length, after a pause of some minutes, she found strength and voice enough to say:—

"This must make a change, my dear Laurence, in our plans."

"A change? What do you mean?"

"As Lady Carrlyon is coming, it is better on all accounts I should leave you."

"Nonsense! Do you suppose I should allow her to turn you out? If my mother comes, she must take us as we are; I have no idea of any change."

"Believe me, Laurence, it is better so. I know your kind nature and all it suggests; but in Gilda's interest, even more than your own, I must beg you to consent to this. You see your mother has a prejudice—not unnatural, I dare say—against the young wife she has never seen, and only heard of through *your* report. She is coming here, I hope, to conquer this; but we shall double the difficulties she encounters by my remaining. I have seen more of the world than you have, Laurence, long, very long ago, that is to say. I know that a wife may often overcome prejudice when her family are not tolerated. Lady Carrlyon will say you have saddled yourself with an unreasonable burden in having your

wife's mother to live with you; and I am afraid her heart may be hardened still more against my child, in consequence."

"My dear Mrs. Courteney," said Carr, taking her hand, "oblige me by saying no more on this subject. I would not for the world allow my mother to suppose you had left us on her account. Allow me to understand her character better than you possibly can. One must be firm,—*firm* with her; that is the thing. I have taken my position with dignity, I flatter myself, in the affair of my marriage, and I am not going to yield an inch. I didn't invite my mother here. If she comes, as I hope and believe, kindly disposed towards Gilda, she will not, she *ought* not, to find it difficult to accept your presence; and I shall let her see at once the position it is my intention that you should always hold among us."

The tears had been silently streaming down his wife's face. She brushed them hurriedly away, and kissed him with trembling lips. Once again, and for the last time, Mrs. Courteney raised her voice in unavailing remonstrance:—

"For God's sake, don't let me be the cause of any misunderstanding between yourself and your mother! Better, a thousand times, that we should not meet again, than that this should be the case. My child and I can never have any difference of feeling, though we should be separated for—a long, *long* time. Her first duty now is towards you and your family. I mustn't come in the way: I mustn't, indeed, Laurence. Let me go. Courteney, almost with his dying breath told me—warned me."

The poor lady stopped short, and pressed her hand to her heart; while the same ghastly pallor, which always accompanied any violent excitement, overspread her face, and her respiration seemed suspended. In a moment Gilda was at her mother's side. From a knowledge of the nature of these attacks, which had at one time been more frequent than of late, she had learnt how to treat them; and in a few minutes Mrs. Courteney, though still pale and exhausted, was breathing tranquilly in her daughter's arms. Carr, with all a man's hopelessness on such occasions, stood by,

and held a bottle of camphor. Of course no more was said then upon the subject, the discussion of which had agitated Mrs. Courteney so greatly; but Carr was further than ever from yielding his point. To do him strict justice, there was something of a chivalrous feeling in this, added to the inherent obstinacy of his character; he had a kindly heart, and the notion of turning Mrs. Courteney adrift, because his mother was an impertinent woman of fashion, was utterly abhorrent to him. As to whether the opposite course was to tend to the happiness of any one concerned, or, with respect to the wisdom of conciliating Lady Carrlyon by degrees, Carr would not so much as entertain these considerations for a moment. Whether rightly or wrongly, he chose to consider that "a principle" was at stake; and, perhaps, because his capital in this stock was slender, he made a great deal of it, and would have died rather than give it up.

To his wife, Carr's inflexible resolve was the only consolation, at a moment when her heart felt very heavy. She realized, for the first time, her

position in her husband's family. He had been so careful in keeping this disagreeable subject out of sight as much as possible, that she only knew the fact of his relations with his family, after a short interruption, having been resumed: which had given her, I believe, greater pleasure than himself. He never spoke of the letters he received from home; read no extracts; transmitted no meaningless conventional messages to his young wife; observed, in short, an almost absolute silence on the subject. It occurred to her sometimes as a strange and formal state of things; a tie, bound, apparently, by little love or thought or interest on either side. Of Lady Carrlyon, as I have said, she had formed an idea on very slender premises. She could not think that the mother cared much for her son; and the father regarded him and his marriage with an equally superb indifference, probably. She was sorry; but then Carr did not seem to care; and it never occurred to her as something which vitally concerned herself. *Now* it did, however: now it dawned on her, with ever-increasing distinctness, that her marriage was the

great barrier which had risen up between Carr and his parents. Her mother's fears, and Carr's rejoinders, opened her eyes to the truth. Heaven help her if she were to find antagonism and enmity in the new home! She clung to the gentle mother who had presided over the old one more closely than ever.

So Mrs. Courteney was to remain. Her daughter told her next morning how grieved Carr would be if she broached the subject again; and when, contrary to her better judgment, the poor lady yielded, her only comfort was in the look of radiant thankfulness that beamed in Gilda's eyes.

That same morning the news of the fall of Vicenza arrived. It was the first serious reverse the patriots had met with: and it changed their note of triumph into one of consternation. Flying rumours of all kinds reached the villa during the day; and our English friends, in spite of family anxieties, chafed and lamented over the dimmed prospects of the Italian National Cause.

CHAPTER VIII.

Lord Carrlyon's gout was the ostensible reason that the shutters in Belgrave Square were closed, and the world of routs and revels deprived of the light of her ladyship's countenance. I don't know whether any one actually went the length of believing that she was a devoted wife. I rather think it was pretty generally looked upon that a tightness in the money market was the secret motive-power in this edifying spectacle of conjugal unity.

However this might be, there was probably another and still more powerful argument, which induced Lady Carrlyon to expatriate herself for a time, under the pleasing subterfuge of attendance on her lord. What this was we may by-and-by see; if, indeed, it were really capable of making

her undertake a tedious and most uncomfortable journey into Italy at this hot season (not free from all risk of personal danger, moreover), after depositing her gouty peer in the hot waters of Wiesbaden. She could not fail to meet with obstructions and annoyances on her road; but among her ladyship's failings she was not justly to be charged with weak nerves. She had an almost unbounded belief in her "position" carrying her through everything. In this she was so far justified on the present occasion, that every facility had been afforded her by all sorts of ministers and men of influence to prosecute her journey. Her writing-case was stuffed with letters to ambassadors and generals, recommending the distinguished lady to their special care. Her sympathies being wholly Austrian, she had felt some reluctance in carrying any credentials to the rebel camp, as she considered Charles Albert's. But prudential motives prevailed. It was pointed out that without some such counterpoise, the Austrian correspondence—innocuous as it was—which she carried, might bring her into

serious difficulty. She might be seized by the Italians as a spy. So she was armed with letters of safe conduct from both parties; and though stopped twenty times each day, and suffering unavoidable delays, these letters stood her in good stead. When politely requested to descend from her carriage at the Sardinian outposts, she showed at the window a letter to the Duke of Genoa, and desired with a lofty urbanity to speak with the officer in command. Her arguments proved so conclusive to that individual, that it was no longer a question of searching her carriage, or obstructing her progress, but of affording her every facility and attention.

In traversing the Austrian lines, it was the same game, only played with more cordiality; and here she generally indulged in an animated political chat with the white-coated blond-moustached heroes, who came clanking their swords up to the carriage-door, and raising two wooden fingers to their forage-caps. At Verona, she was lucky enough to come across an aide-de-camp of Radetzki's, to whom she entrusted her

letter to the old marshal with a lively prayer for his success. These and the lesser obstacles of occasionally finding every post-horse employed for the siege-trains, and every room in the inn occupied by a dozen soldiers — all these, I say, being with patient endurance and *sang-froid* overcome, Lady Carrlyon was at last approaching her journey's end.

Her real feelings and motives she possibly did not very accurately define to herself: they might be modified or strengthened by circumstances. But she at least knew what they were *not*. Anxiety for her dear son's happiness,—a magnanimous sacrifice of prejudice,—an eager desire to greet "the young person" as a daughter-in-law, these lofty sentiments were the stalking-horses her ladyship rode to death; and though they might serve the common purposes of social delusion, there were some who shrewdly suspected that these beasts of burden were unduly freighted.

The admixture of a certain kind of cleverness—worldly sharpness, call it what you will—with a large proportion of folly, is very common; and

just so much Lady Carrlyon possessed. Every one who has read an extract from her letters will be ready to pronounce her a very silly woman. Yet it is doubtful whether those who met her night after night at London parties thought so. They saw in her a successful woman — a woman who had worked her way up, perseveringly, to achieve the work she had appointed herself, and had never swerved nor faltered. Born to poverty, and of a family with no noble or influential connections, she had not only married rank and wealth; she had advanced her position after marriage from being the wife of a respectable fox-hunting old Tory lord, to being one of the most impertinent women in London, an exclusive leader of fashion, in whose train ladies of much higher pretensions in all ways followed tamely. It is all very well to look down with a bird's-eye view upon her follies *now*, and laugh at them; but when we knew her in her palmy days, we confess to having been dazzled. "*Sich* is life," as a great authority has observed.

She is leaning back in her carriage, revolving

in her mind future schemes, future hopes and possibilities, with an eye riveted on one particular button of the cushion opposite. One would say that all her future success depended on her not losing sight of that button for a single moment. Herein you have an index to the woman's character; a pertinacity, with all her frivolity, in holding fast by any idea which her narrow mind has once conceived. If Carr is obstinate, so doubly is his mother, though she has been giving up to him all his life. For she has not the power of carrying things with a strong hand as he has. But then, *en revanche,* she is not as kindly-natured. She is cunning, and in a low, worldly way, far-sighted; she will appear to yield, and yet spare no pains to compass her end; and, though baffled, will return again and again to the charge, from an unexpected quarter.

Lady Carrlyon is still a beautiful woman, over whom the waves of time hitherto have rolled with much the same effect as those other waves upon the hard smooth sea-sand—a wrinkle here and there: no more. The steel-blue eyes flash

keenly as in youth; the brilliant teeth are still faultless; the hair untouched with silver. Her dress betokens an absence of that important sense of the fitness of things, which is unfortunately too common among our countrywomen. Instead of some simple, cool material this hot weather, she is "wearing out" one of last season's gowns; a mauve silk, flounced to the waist, in every fold of which the Italian dust will lodge. She has several bracelets, with lockets like little skulls hanging about her in all directions, and which like the trophies of a barbarian chief, might be supposed to typify her victories. But the truth is, she has had few. Seldom has so handsome a woman inspired so little genuine admiration; though a certain number of hangers-on she is sure of in London.

Beside her, from a round basket, peeped the most repulsive little canine face that human ingenuity ever disfigured. Helplessly fat, with a nose broken flat, and a tongue that lolled perpetually out of its mouth, this engaging animal was the object of Lady Carrlyon's tenderest care

and solicitude. The servants might starve, so that Bépine had her bread and milk. It is not to be supposed, however, that those functionaries showed any symptoms of starving. As they sat in the rumble there, Carl, the large oily courier, and Mrs. Timson, a genteel waiting-maid, devouring a chicken together under the carriage umbrella, they seemed perfectly well able to take care of themselves.

The day had been intensely hot, and it was late in the afternoon as the dusty carriage wound wearily up the hill-side, sinking deep at every step into the hard, dry ruts, and grinding to powder the stones that lay beneath its wheels. The sun was low enough in the horizon to bathe the landscape in that mellow tint which is only seen at the close of an Italian day. The great folds of mountain rolled back one after another, each more intensely purple than the last, and spread themselves out as the carriage ascended higher and higher; until, at last, the edges of the lake below gleamed upon the sight. And then the sheet of golden sky was repeated in

liquid glory, crossed, at intervals, by soft tremulous shadows of violet cloud and mountain. The ruddy shaft of a pine-tree, its thick-tufted branches all a-glow with flaming sunlight, reared itself against the gleaming water, in one place where a little rocky promontory was thrust out into the lake. A silver ripple here and there, like a broken thread of pearls, marked where the lazy stroke of an oar had fallen from under the striped awning of a boat; its freight of laughter-loving Italians, even in these troublous times, singing snatches of Verdi as they took their evening row.

Not so the peasants.

A few vine or olive dressers, returning from their day's work, met the carriage on its ascent. Some of them were leading broad, dun-coloured oxen, with creamy horns and onyx-coloured eyes, yoked to long carts that were laden with the rich fruits of the earth. There was but one expression on those bronzed faces: a sullen endurance. What boots it that the land be flowing with milk and honey? that the "just earth" make such bountiful return for their toil, so long

as their neck be under the Austrian's heel? And the hopes of Italy have been fast melting away these last few days!

But neither the fair face of nature nor the moral aspect of the people attracted much attention from the occupant of the travelling-carriage. She only wondered, with a shudder, as the villa at last came in sight, how any one could think of living in a house like a dilapidated factory, and how it would be possible for her to pass a certain number of weeks there. The poor steaming horses drew up under the white-washed wall, over which a row of lemon-trees showed refreshingly green; and the heavy courier descended and pulled the bell of an iron wicket. Ere it had ceased its discordant jingle, the figure of Carr, in a white jacket and trousers, his fair skin burnt to a rich bronze under the thin straw hat, met his mother's gaze, as he leapt down the steps of the terrace, and threw open the gate.

"Welcome to an Italian house, mother! Up to the last moment I hardly expected you."

He handed her out, and embraced her.

"My dearest boy! My poor Laury! How glad I am to see you, dear! But, good heavens! how brown you are! I should hardly know you, and you had such a nice complexion!"

"The life we lead here, you see, mother, don't exactly conduce to keeping it, as you will soon discover."

"Ah! yes, naturally" (with a sigh). "I understand the whole tone of mind, associates, and so on, very coarse. You needn't be afraid, dear, I am prepared—quite prepared. So you lead a peasant's life here, I suppose—dig, and that sort of thing?"

"Just now we have something else to think of," replied her son, laughing. "I have been constantly on the hills for the last few days, gleaning intelligence about the movements of both armies. You have come to us at an exciting moment. I am glad you have got through all the difficulties of your journey so well, mother; and we will make you as comfortable as we *can* here, but you must not expect the luxuries of Carrlyon."

"Of course not, dear. As Sir Walter used to say, in our hours of ease I might be hard to please, but not when anguish wrings the brow; and I am sure you *have* a great deal to put up with."

"I have a hard bed, and no carpet, to put up with; and the only thing that 'wrings my brow' is the confounded heat," said Carr, with rather a forced laugh and a heightened colour. "That is all: and I am glad to say I support these trials with wonderful equanimity, as do also my wife and her mother."

"Her *mother?*"

"Yes; Mrs. Courteney."

"Do you mean that she is with you?"

"Certainly. Didn't you know that? Gilda, poor child," he went on hurriedly, "is so anxious that you should be pleased with everything,—herself most of all. I hope you will *try* and be so. I hope you come here without any—any—feeling of prejudice, mother."

"Oh, certainly, my dear boy! else why *should* I come? only I didn't understand that you had saddled yourself with the whole family——"

"The whole family consists of Mrs. Courteney."

"But," continued Lady Carrlyon, without heeding the interruption, "having made the first great sacrifice, having overcome any natural objections to receive your wife, my dear Laury, of course I am prepared to see her with your eyes, and to try and overlook her family and everything else."

They had walked slowly up the terraced garden, Lady Carrlyon hanging on her son's arm, and pausing from time to time as this conversation passed. As they approached the loggia she who was the subject of their discourse appeared in sight. She was leaning, in her simple white dress, against the balustrade, looking rather pale. In her nervousness she had plucked a twig of the hoary olive-tree beside her, which she held in her hand; and as she stood there, looking down on the approaching figures, she might not unfitly have represented Peace with her appropriate emblem. Perhaps some such fancy connected with those few silvery green leaves did cross Gilda's mind, for as she watched the advancing group, her trembling hand almost involuntarily

extended the olive-branch, as though pleading against animosity and discord. She waited until they were quite close and looked up, before she descended the steps to meet her mother-in-law. Lady Carrlyon eyed her rapidly all over: then extended both arms and drew Gilda towards her, coldly touching the pale young cheek with her lips. It was a conventional salutation for which Gilda was probably unprepared; in her agitation she let drop the twig of olive, and it fell under Lady Carrlyon's feet. The startled look on the young wife's face the next moment, when she beheld the leaves, to which she had attached almost a superstitious importance, crushed beneath her ladyship's boot, made the latter exclaim,—

"Don't be frightened, my dear, you look quite scared. I have been telling my son that we are to be excellent friends, I hope; so you mustn't look shy and alarmed; nothing is so underbred. You must treat me as your own mother, and then we shall get on very well. Bépine! Bépine! don't be barking at that peacock! Come here,

ma'am! She is dying of hunger, poor little thing! Get her some bread and milk, Laury; and if you have the leg of a chicken, I daresay she could eat it."

Carr knew all his mother's little ways perfectly well: her airs of gracious condescension, seasoned with impertinence; and the rapid transfer of her attention to a yelping spaniel as the subject of paramount importance. He knew what it all meant. He was mortified that Gilda appeared to so little advantage, as he thought; he was annoyed that his mother evidently admired her so little: and he was, above all, angry with himself for feeling irritated. Was it possible that his wife's indescribable charm, which consisted in no dazzling beauty, could be appreciated by Lady Carrlyon? Was it possible, on the other hand, that Lady Carrlyon's nature should change all of a sudden, and her heart be softened towards her daughter-in-law otherwise than by degrees?

They entered the sala, which Gilda's hand had decked with pomegranates and oleanders, and which, in its primitive way, looked really

"Yes; if I can be of any use," repeated the latter, in a helpless kind of way.

"Oh! dear, no, thank you. I have fortunately brought my own sheets; I don't think I *could* sleep in such sackcloth as that. I should have no skin left on my bones in the morning. But I'm not at all particular, you know; and really with a few curtains the room might be made very tolerable. By-the-by, I've had my room at Carrlyon so charmingly done up with pale blue and white lace since you were there. Your father was so absurd about it, couldn't see that the room wanted fresh furniture, and was quite indignant against my poor *portières* and *devants de cheminés*. He always asks, 'What's the use of putting velvet petticoats on the chimney-pieces and doors!' ha! ha!"

"He has a fellow feeling for those dumb sufferers under petticoat government," laughed her son, glancing at his wife, "which I begin to understand now."

"Don't talk nonsense," said his mother, very sharply. "Any man who submits to—to—what

you call petticoat government is a fool. Oh! there you are at last, Timson; what a time you have been! Now you must go away, Laury, and you, my dear, I always forget your name?"

"Gilda, for shortness. Geraldine is my real name."

"I shall call you Geraldine, by all means; much more ladylike. Gilda sounds like a peasant or a pet donkey. No one ever heard of Lady Gilda. That is the test. *Au revoir*, my love, and try and not blush in that way, to oblige me."

The door closed behind Carr and his wife; and each, cautiously avoiding the other's eye, they turned down the passage towards their own rooms without a word. Carr felt that the commencement of a struggle was at hand; he was irritated and depressed, all the more so from the necessity of concealing his real feelings in his mother's presence. As to poor Gilda, uneasy as the prospect of Lady Carrlyon's visit had made her, the reality promised to be far worse. She knew at once that it was impossible there could ever be any sympathy between her mother-in-

law and herself. Worse than that, she was conscious, through the very pores of her skin, that Lady Carrlyon had conceived a deadly enmity towards her, which nothing would change or even mitigate. She was sad and sick at heart: it seemed as though all things conspired against her; but *this* at least was no fault of hers, and she would try and not let it overshadow or take an undue prominence in her young life. She must go forward on her course without fear or wavering; if Lady Carrlyon could never love, she should at least respect her. Thus she struggled with the tears that forced themselves into her eyes, as she sat down for half-an-hour alone in her bedroom before dinner. She was anxious to avoid her mother: that dear mother whose solicitude for her child never failed to detect the least shadow on Gilda's brow, and from whom, if possible, she must now conceal how her tender and sensitive nature had been wounded.

She need not have been afraid. Mrs. Courteney would not have ventured to probe her daughter's heart at that moment. She had kept out of the

way until now: and now, as the hour of her own trial approached, she entered the sala alone, a thought paler than usual, and without any change in the uniformity of her widow's dress. She had been sitting there for some minutes by the window, when the door was thrown open, and Lady Carrlyon sailed in, in a cloud of white embroidery and floating coloured ribbons. A greater contrast than the appearance of the two matrons presented, as they stood there, could scarcely be found. Mrs. Courteney rose, her thin delicate hand leaning on the back of the chair for support, while a sudden flush overspread her cheek. Lady Carrlyon stared at her from head to foot, as though somewhat puzzled or surprised; then, with a freezing inclination of the head, took up a book from the table, and seated herself without a word.

The next two or three minutes that elapsed seemed ages to Mrs. Courteney; then Carr came in, which was a relief. He glanced rapidly from one to the other, went up to his mother, and laying his hand upon her shoulder, said,—

"I conclude you and Mrs. Courteney, my *second* mother, have dispensed with the ceremony of introduction, or shall I go through it, in due form?"

Lady Carrlyon once more inclined her head, this time with a vapoury smile, though secretly indignant at hearing the low person in whose presence she found herself thus styled. She began glibly, nevertheless, after her manner, talking on other subjects, until Gilda slid into the room, and dinner was announced. Then, as her son offered her his arm, and they walked into the next room, she whispered,

"Do in pity tell me, Carr, where it is I have seen that woman? Her face seems familiar to me, years ago; but where, I can't think."

"Nor I," he replied, indifferently.

Her conversation all that evening was addressed exclusively to her son. This might be supposed to be natural after their long separation; but it was certainly not well-bred. Indeed, she purposely talked of things and people concerning whom mother and daughter could know nothing

nor feel any interest. The young wife sat by, bending over her work, and listening to the May-fair gossip, frivolous at best, when not ill-natured or scandalous. It was a new insight into life, and not an agreeable one. There was not a word of friendship or love in this world of Lady Carrlyon's. It was a hard phantasmagoria of people dancing and feasting, struggling for money-bags and coronets, bespattering each other with mud, and grinning like apes, at each other's folly and wickedness. Carr had been living now so many months out of this world, that he derived a certain amusement in hearing of people whom he had known there more or less well. Gilda was surprised to hear him laugh at some of his mother's stories, and gradually fall into a tone of conversation which his wife believed to be foreign to all his real tastes.

And so it was the first evening after Lady Carrlyon's arrival was passed at the villa.

CHAPTER IX.

"As to this horrid mess my poor dear Laurence has got himself into, it must have been a positive infatuation that made him marry that girl. I expected to have found her at least very handsome, in which case she might have had some success in London, to carry off the dreadful *mésalliance;* but she is positively hardly good-looking! with no style, no conversation—nothing! She does the *petite ingénue*—blushes to the eyes when one speaks to her, and has all those affectations of simplicity which I detest. If she were even very *clever*, I could forgive her, for she might advance his interests, perhaps; but I can't make out that she knows anything! In short, I am in despair, for I foresee she will be a clog to my darling through life! And then there's a mother!

a woman, my dear, who looks as if she had been brought up in the Castle of Otranto, and had never recovered the frights of her childhood. I am sure I have seen her before in some melo-drama of the kind, for her face is so dreadfully familiar to me. She never speaks, so you may imagine she is a lively addition to the party. She seems to have fastened upon poor Laury for life; but I must really try some vigorous measure to dislodge her. Do pity me! The case is so much worse than even I anticipated, and *at present* I see no *opening*. But you know I am not easily discouraged; and, having come here, I intend to sacrifice myself for a few weeks to my poor boy's interests. Such a talented creature as he is, and with such prospects, to see him so thrown away! It makes me quite wretched; and it will require a great deal of management to do anything with him, I foresee. Tell me how the dear duchess gets through her confinement," &c. &c.

It was thus Lady Carrlyon wrote to one of her intimate friends (of whom she had related

some piquant anecdotes to her son the evening before,) the day after her arrival.

Carr had ridden off at daybreak into the mountains, with a couple of peasants, to reconnoitre, and pick up what news he could of the Italian army. It was thought there would be a battle near Rivoli, where a large force of the enemy was encamped, while they possessed the whole chain of Monte Baldo. There appeared to be great indecision and uncertainty as to the King's movements; but it was evident that he must soon strike some blow to retrieve the losses to the national cause which had now followed each other in such rapid succession. Carr was excited on the subject, as any other young Englishman would have been. He rode out, as he had done constantly of late, with the stalking-glasses slung upon his back, the pistols in his belt, the well-filled sandwich-box in his pocket—all the appliances, in short, of a *dilettante* campaigner. He was well pleased, he said to himself, at the opportunity of leaving his wife and mother to "become better acquainted, without the intervention of his

presence." He was sanguine enough to hope they might even become intimate by the time he returned! He had been extremely despondent the evening before; but that sunshiny morning he took a brighter view of things. Not so Gilda. Her heart sank within her at the prospect of passing the whole or greater part of the day alone with Lady Carrlyon; for Mrs. Courteney had taken her daughter's hand early that morning, and said gravely,—

"It is your duty, my child, to try and conciliate Lady Carrlyon; and, as she knows you better, I hope you and Laurence's mother may be drawn nearer to each other. You will be constantly thrown together now, and I am glad it should be so. You will get accustomed to any little peculiarities,—what may seem cold or formal will wear off, and you will gradually make allowances for what may hurt or repel you in her manner at first. She is undergoing a severe trial for her son's sake. All this, dear child, makes it incumbent on you to be as much with her as she will allow; and to try and win her affection

if you possibly can. With me, of course, it is quite a different matter. Laurence, in his kindness, was mistaken in wishing me to remain here; and I ought not to have yielded, for I am in a false position. Lady Carrlyon very naturally regards me with animosity. It will be easy, my darling, to forgive *you;* but there is no reason why she should soften her heart towards *me.* The only course I can adopt with dignity, therefore, is to relieve her of my presence as much as possible. My health is sufficient plea for remaining in my room the greater part of the day; and you must not think about me, darling, or come near me. All your time and attention now must be devoted to Lady Carrlyon."

But either a fine lady's caprice or some subtle motive had wrought a marvellous change in her ladyship's manner when, towards the middle of the day, she appeared in the sala. She could not help being impertinent, it is true: she was one of the women who never can, except to some one of whom they stand in awe: but it was the impertinence of familiarity, not that of cutting

disdain. She asked all sorts of questions, without the least regard to the manifest pain it caused Gilda to answer many of them. There were certain things she was bent on discovering, and the easiest means of doing so was from her daughter-in-law direct. Carr had exercised a sound discretion in speaking as in writing about his wife's family; but now everything, or *almost* everything, there was to be known of Gilda's early life was probed and sifted out by his mother. The Courteneys' wanderings, the utter seclusion in which they lived, the first acquaintance with Laurence, all this by degrees Lady Carrlyon induced Gilda to tell her about. The young wife felt as if she had no right to refuse to answer any of these questions; she only shrank from speaking of her father; and here even Lady Carrlyon's unflagging perseverance failed to elicit much information. She turned abruptly into another path.

"How old are you, my dear?"

"Just nineteen."

"Oh! However, I suppose you had many

admirers before you finally condescended to marry Laurence, eh?"

Gilda shook her head.

"Come, nonsense! you don't mean to tell me that, living in Italy—this land of song and passion, as poor Byron would have called it—that you never had a flirtation before you knew Laurence, my dear Geraldine?"

"Indeed not. No, I never had a flirtation."

"Well, but tell me now how many young men have you ever known intimately in your life?"

"Laurence was the first, the only young Englishman I ever knew."

She spoke hurriedly, and Lady Carrlyon glanced sharply at her face the while.

"But plenty of Italians?"

"Very few."

Her ladyship mused for a few moments.

"How very romantic! A first love! and though it isn't exactly that with Carr,—for, of course, you know that it was his quarrel with Lady Maud Brabazon that drove him abroad?—(and a most

advantageous match that would have been for him—ministerial connection, and so on)—yet it is certainly very romantic and high-minded of him, giving up the world for your sake, as he is doing, my dear, and abandoning all his fine prospects."

"I don't know what you refer to," replied Gilda, with some touch of pique in her voice. "I am not aware of Laurence's having made any particular sacrifice. It is his own choice, not from any request of mine, that we are still in Italy. I am ready to follow him where and when he likes, and should be the last to interfere with any prospects of his. I wish heartily, on the contrary, that he had some profession: I think if he were a working man he would be happier."

"I spoke of his *matrimonial* prospects, my dear. You will excuse me, I know. As to his being what you call 'a working man' (which is a horridly vulgar term, my dear Geraldine), dear Laurence has too much genius to be a plodding man in an office, or anything of that sort. With strong ministerial connection, I think he might

have been Secretary of State, for most of the dry work, I believe, is left to the Under Secretary, or the Under Secretary's secretary. But all that, you see, requires interest! Poor dear Lord Carrlyon never had any, except in the hunting-field; and now Laury has been and thrown away his chances; which, as I say, my dear, is certainly very *romantic*."

Gilda's blood, poor child, was roused to reply, and though her lips trembled she said, very distinctly,

"You do your son an injustice, Lady Carrylon. He would scorn to be indebted to his wife for position or interest. I thought that *all* who bore the name of Carrlyon would be too proud to harbour any such thought; as I know that *he*—my husband—would. But I suppose that parents think differently on these subjects."

"As you might have learnt from your own, my dear. However, let that pass. I am only anxious now that you should realize your husband's position, and the necessity of sacrificing yourself for his good, if you are called on. As to his continuing to live buried away from the world,

it is, of course, perfectly absurd, and you must use all your influence to make him come to England, and see what we can do for him there, in the way of getting him something."

"Certainly, Lady Carrlyon; I have already said ——"

"Yes, yes, my dear, I know all you mean, but it isn't enough that you shouldn't urge him to *stay*, you must urge him to *go*, even if it is without you, for a time. Women are very often in the way—particularly when they are not women of business."

"I shall accompany him, wherever it be, unless he forbids it," said Gilda, quietly.

Much more of the same sort of conversation passed; Lady Carrlyon putting out a number of feelers in different directions, and making herself acquainted with her daughter-in-law's sentiments on a variety of important points. If baffled in some particulars, she was successful in most. How far the knowledge, thus gained, was satisfactory to her ladyship, may be better judged of hereafter.

In the afternoon, a peasant-lad came up through the mulberry plantations from a salmon-coloured villa upon the borders of the lake, the gazebo of which was distinctly visible from the Fossombroni. This villa, it now appeared, was the property of Madame Santi, who, with her niece, the marchesa, had arrived there the previous evening. The marchesa wrote, with characteristic effusion, in her long spidery characters, to the effect that she would come up in her *portantina* to pay the Laurence Carrs a visit in the cool of the evening, if they were at home. Gilda, who really liked the marchesa, hailed the prospect with thankfulness, as a relief from the undivided burden of Lady Carrlyon's company. The latter, who, it will be remembered, had originally procured the introduction for her son, was no less pleased to find there was "some one, one has heard of before," in these parts. She regretted, indeed, to learn that the marchesa was an enthusiastic patriot: such radical principles being only fit for the low-born; but her claims, as a woman of family, went far to balance this drawback.

Carr returned earlier than his wife expected. He brought no news. He had come upon a small detachment of volunteers marching across the mountains to join the King's army, by some intricate paths only known to the peasants who guided them; but these raw troops could give him no information. The towns, they said, were beginning to murmur at the King's inaction. It was hoped that he would strike a bold blow to recover Verona, as the old marshal, it was thought, began likewise to show symptoms of languor.

The family party sat drinking their coffee in the loggia, after dinner, when two brawny boatmen were seen toiling up the plantation, bearing an arm-chair upon poles between them. The goodly form of the marchesa was no light freight, to judge from the condition of her porters; and with the amusing familiarity of Italians, they remarked jocosely on her increase of weight, since they had last the honour of carrying the *Eccelenza*. She had a black veil on her head, and in her hand a fan and a large

parasol. She discoursed freely with her two bearers, and laughed, and addressed them indifferently as "caro mio," in a way that excited the unbounded astonishment of Lady Carrlyon, who through her double eye-glass watched the approach of the procession.

Carr greeted her very cordially and presented her to his mother. The very *un*simple manners of the English lady — they could hardly be called affected, they were so much a part of herself — evidently afforded the Italian some amusement. There was a quiet twinkle in her eye every now and then, which betrayed her. But Lady Carrlyon was not allowed much opportunity for display. There were so many questions to be asked, and the marchesa had so much to say, that the talk was soon entirely hers. The movements of the Sardinian army,—the prospects of the National Cause,—the political *si dice's*, with which we have now nothing to do, she descanted on them all. There was one point on which both Gilda and her mother burned to question the marchesa; but they wisely refrained,

and were rewarded, after a time, for their patience.

"I can't think," observed Lady Carrlyon, with her usual tact and good taste, "how it is you don't like those *distingués* Austrians, in their white coats, my dear Laury. So thorough-bred, so patrician! But I'm a Tory, and can't tolerate."

"Do tell me what a *Tori* is, milady?" cut in the marchesa, with a good-humoured smile.

"Oh! everything that's *constitutional*—you don't understand the meaning of *that* term either, I dare say."

"They are for giving us constitutions now at last," laughed the marchesa. "Shall we all be turned into *Toris*, Signor Carr? Not if it is to make us love the white coats."

"Poor Sir Walter!" sighed Lady Carrlyon, sentimentally. "Talking about Toryism and white coats puts me in mind of meeting him, just as he came from Rome. The last time I saw him, poor man, I asked him if he'd found much to interest him: 'Not so much as a pair of *his—trowsers*' (he used a stronger expression

than trowsers,) alluding to Charles Edward, who was always in his thoughts! Beautiful, wasn't it? Such a Jacobite, Sir Walter!"

"Was he not a great lover of the people?" asked Gilda.

"Oh! he liked them in their proper place, not when they want to overthrow governments, and all that sort of thing. I'm really sick to death of the name myself. Everything now is done for the people."

"Not *here*," said Gilda, venturing to raise her voice again. "Indeed, Lady Carrlyon, you have only to hear the horrible state in which they found the prisons—the injustice——"

"My dear," interrupted her ladyship sharply, "you don't suppose that, accustomed to mix in political circles as I am, I don't know all the stuff that's talked? There isn't a word of truth in it. Lord Finsbury, who was minister for such a long time at Florence, assured me it was impossible for anything to be more luxurious than the prisons, both at Rome and at Naples."

"My brother," remarked the marchesa, "was

confined in one of the former for *thirteen* years, in consequence of a pasquinade he wrote when a boy of sixteen. I do not think he found it luxurious, milady. But we never could tell: for he was at last liberated by death!"

"Horrible!" said Carr. "Italians would not have been men, if they had not risen to free themselves from such a state of things. But tell me, marchesa, how comes it that you have left the camp at this moment?"

"I had the fever" (Italians use this generic term for every variety of disorder), "and was obliged to be quiet. My cousin, too, has been wounded, and is coming here—where he will be better off than in the hospital—so soon as he can be moved; but the aunt, you understand, could not nurse him alone. Talking of hospitals, by-the-by, poor dear Guido Lamberti, Madame Courteney, is well again at last, and has returned to his duty. I hope he will not try his strength too soon, for he gave us fine work, after you left! It seems that that very night he had a most exciting conversation with,—*you know whom*,

madame,—and I suppose your suspicions were correct; for those in the ward who were nearest to where Guido lay, report to having heard them in violent discussion! At all events, it produced a return of fever, and he was very ill for two or three days.

"What became of *her?*" asked Mrs. Courteney, in a low voice.

"Disappeared, and no one knew where! Some say she has been seen in the vicinity of the camp: but no one can positively say what has become of her. I could not exactly supply her place, you understand, but I was with him as much as I could be, and one of the good nuns nursed him when I was not there. At all events, we indulged him with no exciting conversations, and so his youth and a fine constitution carried him through."

Gilda, who had been drinking in every word with her eyes and ears, heaved unconsciously a long-drawn sigh. Her husband, without appearing to watch her, had not lost one variation of her countenance. He knew not to whom the

marchesa's remarks referred; but it was extremely gratifying to learn that there was some fair lady on terms of such *extreme* intimacy with his former rival; and that Gilda should know it. His thoughts never for an instant turned in the direction of Sara Gisborne; and he was indeed profoundly indifferent who Guido's devoted nurse might be. It was enough his wife should know there *was* such a person. Lady Carrlyon, meantime, with all her perceptions quickened by the desire to convict her daughter-in-law of some backsliding, glanced from one to the other, and then at Mrs. Courteney, and thought, as she subsequently expressed it, "there was *something*."

Finally, after further gossip connected with the camp, which in no way concerns us, and when the rapid twilight had been succeeded by a glorious moon rising over the lake, the marchesa stepped into her *portantina*, and, escorted by Carr, whose glowing cigar-end shone like a fire-fly among the trees, retraced her steps to the Villa Santi.

CHAPTER X.

A FEW mornings after, his mother took the opportunity of having what she called some "quiet conversation" with Carr. He seemed rather absent at first, but her ladyship had a fine art for rousing any dormant flesh and blood, by the goodly home-thrusts she dealt—no matter where; if about the heart, so much the better.

"I'm afraid your father's affairs are still in a sad mess," she said, after awhile; "and I fear the property will come to you dreadfully embarrassed, Laury."

"I hope it won't come to me at all, for a long time," said he, hastily. "But how is this? I thought that my enabling him to sell the Clapton farm and woods, would have eased his mind, at all events, of some portion of this burden. I have

asked for no increase to my very small allowance. How is it he is so heavily embarrassed?"

"Oh! it's entirely that ruinous hunting and horse-racing, and——"

"Why, my father never had racers."

"Oh! well; but he used to *go* to races, and it's all the same thing; for, of course, he betted. It's of no use pretending that he didn't. And it is quite absurd laying it upon *my* expenses. No woman of my rank ever went without so many things they really wanted. I had no ball last year. I wouldn't have Mario at my concert, but put up with some horrid new man, because he was cheaper! I'm sure I *try* and economize. And then, as I tell him, he ought to be so obliged to me for not having had daughters!—such an expense bringing them out, and then portioning them! Where would he have been now, I should like to know? Talking about that, dear, it's very noble of you, and like yourself, living on your small allowance; and the *one* satisfactory point—to be frank—about your marriage is, its rendering you independent; though,

of course, you might have had a much greater fortune. By-the-by, you never told us exactly *what* you got with your wife."

"My wife has a small fortune settled upon her, and in the hands of trustees. I don't possess a farthing of it."

Lady Carrlyon dropped her crochet; and could hardly frame her face into proper composure, after nearly a minute had elapsed, to exclaim—

"I never heard of such a thing! Your own doing, I suppose? Vastly generous and romantic, I'm sure, my dear boy. Then am I to understand that you are living upon her *bounty?*"

Carr coloured to the roots of his hair.

"I preferred doing so, to living upon my father's, when he would not acknowledge my marriage."

Lady Carrlyon coughed.

"Is this to be *à perpétuité*, my dear?"

"That depends on my father, and partly on my own chance of getting a livelihood for myself."

"Exactly. That's just it. Now don't you think

you'd better come to England and see what can be done for you there? The duchess, you know, used to be very fond of you, and, of course, the duke could give you something good, if he *chose*. But as long as you remain here, you know, why nothing is to be done!"

"And how about Gilda? We are living very economically here, as you perceive. In fact, to be plain with you, I shouldn't be able to live in England in a way I should like, upon what we have."

"Well; let us see—perhaps you might leave her here. Just for a little time, you know, until you hear of something that would suit you?"

"*Leave* her? I rather think not. If I waited as long as I have already done, I should be absent some years! Very few things, I'm afraid, *do* suit me: the fault of my education, I suppose. No, no, mother; when my father can make me a suitable allowance, I'll come to England; until then, I'll paint pictures in Italy, and sell them, if I can."

"I *hope* not, my dear Laury, for your wife's

sake, if for no other reason, I *hope* not! She seems an amiable young person, but you must allow she has not that *tournure* which is so requisite to a woman of fashion. It isn't to be expected that she *should*, of course, in her position; and mixing in the best circles might do a great deal for her. Indeed, I've no doubt the duchess, out of kindness to you, would take her by the hand, which would be everything, I need hardly say!"

"Still, if my wife remains in Italy, while I am dancing about town *en garçon*, I hardly see how she is to benefit by these advantages?"

"Of course I mean *ultimately*, when you are in office; but as long as you remain here, you know, there is no chance of your getting anything. Out of sight, out of mind. By-the-by, do not think me indiscreet, dear, but I suppose the mother was a stipulation? a sort of necessary tax you pay on your wife's income, isn't she?"

"Mrs. Courteney came to us by my invitation, subsequent to my marriage; and she now

remains here, contrary to her own urgent solicitation, at my express desire."

"Oh!" said his mother. "Well, I dare say she is a good woman. No *manners*, but that can't be expected from a person who has never lived in good society, you know—has brought up her daughter strictly, I hope? Strong religious principles? You know I was always particular about religious principles."

"Very particular," chimed in her son.

"And living abroad makes people so lax—so very lax; as the Bishop of Tonbridge Wells was remarking to me the other day. 'If you *once* lower your standard,' he said. I hope, my dear, you won't lower your standard, eh?"

"The standard of liberty? By no means."

"Nonsense. Don't pun on serious topics. I always brought you up on high-church principles, and I really was quite in hopes you would have written something theological in the style of Lord Grampion's *Journey in a Rumble to Rome; so* interesting! his interviews with the priests,—always had the best of the arguments; and it would have

done you so much good with our party, if you had done something like it. But to return to what I was going to say: I do seriously hope these Courteneys are not going to make you a Catholic, my dear Laurence?"

"What on earth should make you suppose so? They are as Protestant——" he was going to add "as you are," but stopped short.

"Well, my love, they are evidently radicals; and have made you so—at least, about these horrid Italians; and when principles are *once* undermined one never knows where it will stop. That reminds me to ask you who this very intimate friend of theirs is, whom Madame Onofrio was talking about yesterday? I never saw such an agonized face as your wife had all the time the marchesa was talking about his illness. Of course he is a near relation?"

Carr turned sharply to the window, and drummed the devil's tattoo with his fingers on the shutter.

"He is an old friend—nothing more. Hallo! my lady, there's your precious spaniel in trouble.

Bépine! Bépine! she's got into the *fattore's* yard, and all the ducks and turkeys are making an onslaught upon her!"

Lady Carrlyon flew out into the loggia, with the air of a Niobe, calling distractedly for her wretched little dog. Bépine, for her part, would fain have reached the haven of her mistress's arms, but having surreptitiously effected an entrance into the farmyard through a gap in the wall, she found, as her betters have sometimes done in like circumstances, that she had forgotten her way out! The maternal solicitudes of the ducks and turkeys being most unnecessarily roused by the presence of this formidable specimen of the canine race, they one and all, with a chorus of quacks and shrieks and cackles, set upon the unfortunate Bépine. In vain the obese, asthmatic little creature endeavoured to escape from her pursuers: unaccustomed for years to the legitimate use of her legs in running, she made the most piteous efforts to perform this feat, which, far from exciting the generous compassion of the feathered mob, only elicited what appeared to be shouts of derisive laughter. There

was a foremost old turkey, who gobbled and inflated her red throat, like an infuriated dowager, and uttered a paralytic cry of exultation from time to time which was appalling to hear. She it was, apparently, who gave the time to the rest. Flapping their wings, with outstretched throats, and wide open bills, the ferocious phalanx pressed hard on the poor little wretch, who with eyes starting out of her head, terrified and bewildered, finally plunged into the deep brown pond where the farm oxen stood, the water streaming from their black muzzles, as they raised their heads in stony wonder, their eyes dilated on the luckless Bépine. This settled her fate. Carr sprang over the low *fattoria* wall almost at the same instant, but it was too late. After a few ineffectual efforts to keep above water, the little black head and red helpless tongue sank like a stone, while the circle of blue and green ducks, with their orange bills glancing in the summer sun, dived and wagged their tails and quacked with diabolical delight, and the oxen pawed and bellowed round them. The poor little animal was probably choked by the

unsavoury mud thus raised, if fright and exhaustion had not already done their work. Before Carr and the farm-servants were able to rescue her life was extinct.

No words can adequately describe the storm of Lady Carrlyon's passionate tears and wrathful execrations. It would have been touching had it not been comical to find the woman who prided herself on her aristocratic impassability giving way to this vehement, unbridled grief for the loss of her pet dog. She accused every one in turn of being the cause of this disaster. She declared to her son that she knew it was part of a plot to get rid of her. There was no measure to the foolish things she said and did, which her worldly cunning at another moment would have reproved. Possibly other causes of irritation now found vent in this channel, and as Gilda and her mother prudently kept aloof from the irate lady, the vials of her wrath were emptied on her son and her maid. Carr was glad it should be so: he was ashamed of his mother's splenetic folly. Such outbursts he knew were rare—very rare indeed; and she

already cut a sufficiently unattractive figure, he was well aware, in his wife's eyes. Still, the task of throwing oil upon those troubled waters required all his patience; and that ease-loving man was not long-suffering in this respect.

CHAPTER XI.

I HAVE said that other causes possibly occasioned the measure of Lady Carrlyon's irritation to brim over. The fact is, she was thoroughly out of humour with the results of her visit so far. She could find no ground for hope in any fact connected with her son's marriage. She had been here nearly a week, yet neither polished impertinence, cajoleries, nor innuendoes had succeeded in shaking the domestic foundation; nor did the seeds of discord she scattered with so liberal a hand seem likely to be productive in separating husband and wife. Yet to what else could she look forward? It was of course clear that her son had been entrapped into a marriage by low, designing people. Even the idea that he derived any personal pecuniary advantage by the trans-

action was now swept away. If they were separated to-morrow, Carr would be no penny the richer through his wife, while he would carry this wretched millstone about his neck, incapacitating him from contracting any "advantageous" marriage. Was it not enough to wring the heart-strings of a miserable, world-corroded mother, whose ignoble ambitions were to receive their crown and sceptre, so to speak, in this only son? Truly the sorrows of the pure in heart are as nothing compared with the disappointments of those whose best affections even have the soil and taint of this world.

The attitude of Mrs. Courteney was especially aggravating. Lady Carrlyon could have desired to have had frequent opportunities of showing that low person what she thought of her; but the latter undeviatingly held to her course of strict retirement. With simple, unobtrusive dignity she withdrew from any direct intercourse with Carr's mother; never appearing in the sala, except when obliged to do so, and then taking no share in the conversation, but seated some-

what apart, busily plying her knitting-needles. The shy but enthusiastic temperament of her daughter-in-law offered Lady Carrlyon more frequent opportunities of wounding and humiliating her; and when Carr was not present she exercised these with some ingenuity.

It is surprising how far an utterly foolish and contemptible woman may succeed in tormenting a very noble one; as the horse writhes under the sting of an insect. Gilda felt that it was the sting of an insect, and yet she writhed. She began to have a full appreciation of her mother-in-law's pettiness and vulgarity of mind: she could, moreover, generally exercise a remarkable restraint over her own words, in conversation with Lady Carrlyon. But the wound often rankled, though she might despise the hand that dealt it. It was in vain to repeat to herself what she knew to be the truth. Had she loved her husband with a different sort of love, the poison might have been powerless: as it was, there was no absorbing passion strong enough to counteract its influence. The feeling which I have endea-

voured to indicate as growing up more and more in her, was just of that nature to be most acutely sensitive to these stabs from her husband's mother. When two hearts are all in all to each other, it is comparatively of little moment though the whole world be against them. Anything short of this, on either side (and not many are capable of a love so self-complete), demands sympathy and help, family ties, the encouragement of friendly voices, and the binding love of children. Whether or not it should please Heaven to send Gilda that last and best blessing, it seemed probable that the comfort of the others, at least, would be denied her on her future road.

And in secret she often sighed and faltered over this; though her whole object was to conceal from Carr that she suffered under his mother's behaviour. He was scarcely less anxious to shut his eyes to the fact. He was sufficiently uncomfortable as it was; his tranquillity of mind disturbed; all sorts of unwelcome thoughts, doubts, and dilemmas, flitting like ugly clouds athwart the serenity of his summer sky. Most

of these were untangible as the clouds themselves: to few of them, probably, would he have confessed, even in the locked closet of his own heart. And yet they obscured the sunshine. He didn't care what his mother said—much less what she thought—why should he? Had he ever cared much? Had he not acted in the matter of his marriage without the most remote reference to her feeling or opinion? Didn't he know beforehand all she would say on any given subject? and hadn't he, from his youth upwards, been protesting against all his mother's doctrines?

The weakness and inconsistency of human nature is a stale theme. To take up one's parable and preach thereon must be a profitless task, when a man's own heart and the lives of all around him bear such abundant witness to the same. The one of whom we write was no exception to the rule. If we have succeeded in giving the reader any idea of Laurence Carr, he will understand that contradiction and inconsistency were inherent in him. It may sound paradoxical to say that his actions were perpetually at variance

with his character; but it is no less true. Yet out of these very anomalies arose that unity which might make a shrewd observer predict with some certainty when the *active* man would belie and oppose the *passive* one. More than one such occasion we have already noticed. And now, in spite of his strong attachment to his wife, in spite of natural obstinacy and a just contempt for all his mother's opinions (somewhat too openly expressed), this same silent and unacknowledged resolution was working in Carr. He grew accustomed to the idea of himself as one who had made a noble self-sacrifice. He didn't regret the fact; but he didn't mind the world's acknowledging it, for of course it *was* a fact, though it was one which now for the first time he saw in this light: his natural generosity and chivalry of sentiment having blinded him hitherto. When Lady Carrlyon had once accustomed him to accept this position, she had accomplished a great deal more than she was aware of. He didn't tolerate her insinuations, he didn't listen to her remarks, a bit more; but he was content to be regarded as an unheard-of

paragon of devotion, in "sacrificing all his prospects"—as the phrase ran—upon the altar of love. Of course every little privation for the present, every difficulty or possible annoyance for the future, was to be laid upon the same altar after this, and contributed, it is to be feared, to the incense of self-laudation.

But in some other respects it was yet more singular how Lady Carrlyon's presence wrought a change in her son. He had no sympathy with her love of fashionable society: he was never tired of declaring this, and often avowed that a London season afforded, to his mind, the least satisfactory intercourse with one's fellow-creatures of any condition of humanity. Yet he was now unaccountably seized with the desire that his wife should take her place and shine in this very circle which he despised! Was it because Lady Carrlyon held her cheap? Could not Gilda afford this and any other amount of disparagement? Lastly, was so poor a triumph worth the exchange to an existence of struggle, and heartburn, and unrest?

There was yet another point whereon Carr was uncomfortable, and angry with himself for feeling uncomfortable, since his mother came. He was upright and straightforward, with all his faults; had a horror of crooked ways, a disdain of suspicion. But we have seen that he *could* suspect, and that his jealousy could make him cruelly unjust. On these tender places some of Lady Carrlyon's random shots took effect. More especially the one which assumed that Carr had been accepted for his worldly position rather than from preference. "Of course," her ladyship would say, "a girl of *that sort*, living in Italy too, had some love affair *before;* but naturally she was dazzled by the idea of becoming your wife, my dear Laurence—the position, and all together,—so one mustn't be *too* hard upon her, if she *does* seem rather cold."

Now, though Carr knew this deduction was utterly false, the premiss was true. He cursed his own stupidity fifty times a day for recurring to a suspicion so utterly unworthy of his pure-hearted wife; but still the words rankled. And

as they were repeated in some form or other whenever his mother and he had any conversation, there was no chance of their passing away and being forgotten. Whenever Guido's name occurred in conversation—as it generally did the evenings the marchesa spent at the villa—Carr's eye furtively watched Gilda, while he framed a thousand theories as to her feelings: the next moment indignantly repudiating every unworthy suspicion of her, and striding out into the garden with knit brow and flushed cheek. This restless, irritable state of mind was the growth of two short weeks. Gilda perceived and attributed it to its right cause. It did not endear Lady Carrlyon to her, or render that lady's visit more acceptable than it at first appeared. Since her dog's death she had been more unbearably silly and impertinent than ever; and now, a fortnight after her arrival, as the party sat at dinner, a greater contrast to the cheerful trio who met there a few mornings before could hardly be found. There had been a "row" in the Italian household: Lady Carr-

lyon's two servants giving themselves such insolent airs in imitation of their mistress, that the cook had been moved to brandish a *coltello* over Carl the courier's head, and the black-eyed *donna di facenda*, it was asserted, had fastened upon Mrs. Timson, and reft from her a handful of sandy locks. For these outrages the queen-mother had demanded summary justice to be inflicted, and great was her wrath when her son attempted to defend the delinquents, on the score of Italian temperament, and the difference of "manners."

"Manners! do you call it manners to rush at people with kitchen-knives? It's really horrible, Laurence! You have got so demoralized, living among these people, I really believe you don't think there's any harm in it. But I see what it is: of course, if they were not *my* servants, some notice *would* be taken,—but your wife and her mother, I suppose, put them *up to it*, and it is another covert insult to *me*, like my poor Bépine's death! Nothing shall induce me to believe that was *accident*."

They were in the loggia alone, but her ladyship's angry voice was considerably raised.

"If you will talk in this way, mother, pray speak in a lower voice, for I should be sorry that Mrs. Courteney or Gilda should hear you. As to their being your servants: if they were *not* your servants, let me tell you that I should have turned them out neck and crop long ago. These patrician ways don't suit Italians, who are accustomed to be spoken civilly to."

"Oh, of course! I understand. As little, I suppose, as *my* patrician ways suit your wife? I take the hint, my dear, but we shall not remain here *long*, to trouble them—only, as long as one *is* here, one would be glad to have one's servants treated *decently*. It would be a bore to have one's courier's throat cut, though manners *are* so different. I have gone through a great deal," continued her ladyship, with a sudden change to the *larmoyant* in her tone, "I have gone through a great deal, Laurence, in coming to see you here, and I did not expect to be treated as I have been. I consented to receive the person you have

chosen to marry, which was of course a great *sacrifice*, and I wished to take her by the hand and *form* her a little, if possible, and I should have introduced her into the best circles; but I have been met with such *ingratitude*, that all my warm feelings are crushed—*crushed!*—and—and I see it's of no use, and that you are so fond of this low kind of society, that it is impossible to *raise* you, or make you wish for anything better now. Your old friends will scarcely *believe* it! I dread to think of what the duchess will say! Of course, my poor boy," added she, with a change of tone, "it isn't *your* fault, you're under this fatal influence, 'But it shall be thou shalt lower to her level day by day,' as Lord Byron or somebody or other says; so that now you can even see your mother insulted without resenting it!"

"You really talk in a way, mother, that is enough to provoke a more patient man than I am. Who dreams of insulting you? not Gilda. She is constantly trying to devise some scheme for your amusement. It was but last evening

she suggested having a party of the peasants up here, on the lawn, to dance the *saltarella* for you, and——"

"A refined entertainment!"

"And she is always urging me not to think of her, but to devote myself more to you. If your servants give themselves airs, my wife can't help that. So long as you can put up with our ways here (they are rough, but you knew that when you came), Gilda and I will try and make you happy; but I never expected you would be able to stand an Italian life for long. When we come to England—I suppose we shall some day—I think you will perceive that my wife's manners are not quite what you seem to fancy, and that without any *forming* she will not disgrace the station in which she is placed."

Lady Carrlyon muttered something about his being satisfied, *of course*, and turned on her heel, more completely out of humour—more thoroughly discouraged, than she had yet been. She had played her highest cards, and was beaten. There was a very distinct hint in that closing speech

of Carr's, that unless her views underwent some modification, the duration of her visit might with propriety be curtailed. Must she really return home, baffled at every point? Must she submit to be beaten out of the field by this mere child, and her mother? Must she give up the hope of leading her son back to the path of ambition, or at least of vanity, and social success? of separating him from this "low connection" in *any* way if possible? or, last hope of all, of moulding her daughter-in-law to her own ways and wishes? It certainly appeared so. If she remained she must alter her tone; she must stoop to dissemble, and really to these people in her present frame of mind! no, she couldn't do this. There certainly never was an unhappy mother more to be pitied; and she found her only consolation in the sympathizing breast of Mrs. Timson. Not that she actually followed that time-honoured custom of heroines in old comedies by which the tiring-woman becomes at once a confidant and a confederate. Lady Carrlyon said very little herself; but her astute maid knew the

signs of the times, and profited by them, and she was rewarded after her kind. She had made the most of that quarrel in the morning; and now when her feelings were still irritable, in the afternoon, she diverged into another path, where she had often before led her too willing mistress.

"It's uncountable to me, m' lady, how a party with any pretentions to gentility can demean theirselves so low as to make their own gownds. There's Mrs. Courteney makes every stitch she wears, as I'm informed. And to be sure the sleeves is ridic'lously old fashioned—quite the year before last—let alone the tight body, which if you remember right, m' lady, went out three seasons ago. As to Mrs. Carr, really, m' lady, I'd tell Mr. Carr, if I was you, that she do disfigure 'erself hawful with them bands so tight to her 'ead, instead of the 'air a little full. I suppose, m' lady, she's seen nothing different. They mostly 'ere seem to 'ave a disgusting lot of 'air, which, as I'm informed, they plaster with tallow-candles to their 'eads."

"Disgusting!" ejaculated her ladyship, with a shudder.

"I'm sure I'd hoffer willing, m' lady, as your ladyship's daughter-in-law, and I not above my sitivation, which is only a servint, I'm well aware, and no need to be treated as I *'ave* been by some people, to dress 'er 'air myself once; but I'm afraid, m' lady, the hoffer wouldn't be 'preciated."

"Wouldn't be understood," responded her mistress, shaking her head.

"I don't complain for myself," continued Mrs. Timson, with an increase of spiteful humility, "of not being spoke to, and gave a bed as you wouldn't put an 'orse to sleep upon, and the insults untold as I've 'ad 'eaped on me, which ham but a servint I'm well aware, though ladies-maids 'as their rights; leastways the dook always nodded 'is 'ead, or said, 'I 'ope your 'ealth's well, Mrs. Timson,' when he met me in the passage; which I've never 'ad a word from the ladies 'ere, and I've no call to expect it, I suppose, though it *is* aggravoking, m' lady, to see Mrs. Carr's familiarity with them low Italians. I 'eard 'er

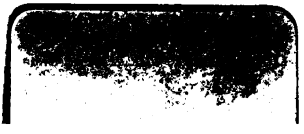
call that fellow Jewsippe, *carro mio*, which Mr. Finks said he wouldn't think of calling *me*, and that it meant *my dear!* I couldn't 'ardly believe my hears, I was that shocked! I wasn't sure I didn't ought to have fainted. It might have woke her to a sense, m' lady."

Her mistress again shook her head gloomily, and sighed. She said nothing; but Mrs. Timson knew that her words had not been unacceptable, and that that blue mantle she coveted (Finks said that blue became her) would devolve on her shoulders all the sooner in consequence.

A party of four persons, as I have said, never sat down to a meal more ill at ease than did the family at the villa that day to their early dinner. Lady Carrlyon, wrapped in dignified abstraction, played with the *bréloques* on her chain, not deigning to open her lips. She had decided on no course of action as yet, and *in medio tutissimus* was her ladyship's motto when wavering between insolence and insincerity.

Gilda was silent and sad. She was not superstitious, but there was a weight at her heart

which might have been held to predict some vague calamity. Was it only that household worry in the morning, and her increasing dread of and aversion to her mother-in-law? Carr, at least, was unusually tender and demonstrative to her since his conversation with his mother. It seemed as though he were trying to compensate to his wife for all the discomfort and annoyance to which she was daily exposed. He was terribly worried, for his mother's visit was turning out even worse than he feared. He wished she would go quietly away, without making any more rows. He hated rows, and he resolved he would not pay attention to anything she said. But even while his manner was so magnificent and *insouciant* with his mother, he was anything but at ease himself; and though he saw the whole absurdity and injustice of her accusations as clearly as any one could, his own line of conduct was by no means so plainly chalked out as his tone indicated. Could he really, if things came to their worst, turn his own mother out of his house? Impossible.

Mrs. Courteney was the calmest of the party. She had brought her knitting to the table, and laid it beside her; but the sitting there was little more than a matter of form: nearly every dish passed by her untasted. There were long oppressive silences, broken only by the sound of knife and fork. Carr made one or two forced attempts to be witty, but they were felt to be failures. At last they drew their chairs into the loggia, and coffee was served. The post-bag at the same moment was brought in, and laid upon the table. It contained but one letter, and that was for Lady Carrlyon.

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